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**JESUS' KINGDOM MESSAGE AND GHANA'S NEW CHRISTIANITY:
A Contextual Approach to the Praxis of the Kingdom of God**

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Master of Philosophy

**In
Intercontextual Theology**

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ABSTRACT

This study critically investigates into some of the controversial practices of the neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana with a particular focus on the challenge of the prosperity gospel and the leaders' misuse of money. The gospel or Christianity that was introduced during the colonial rule met resistance because it was comprehended by the hearers as another form of imperial power. Consequently, Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkrumah called on the people to *seek first the political kingdom of the nation*, that is, to prioritize the freedom from colonial imperialism and its alliances over the so-called *kingdom of God*. Today, through the propaganda of the classical and neo-Pentecostal churches, the gospel or Christianity is growing at an alarming rate.

However, the gospel being preached by these new churches appears different from that of Jesus' good news of the kingdom of God. It is noted that the themes propagated by the neo-Pentecostal Christianity seem to rather place the poor in bondage or suffering and enriches the pastors of these churches. Thus, the prosperity gospel or the kingdom of God they claim to preach leads to exploitation of the poor, deny them the last coin in their pockets. Thus, instead of giving to the poor, the poor are rather asked to give, a reverse of Jesus' kingdom message.

The study has been carried out through various approaches such historical, ethnographic, systematic and contextual models. It establishes that the gospel of the kingdom that is being preached in Ghana today is a misrepresentation of Jesus' kingdom of God. Whereas the Jesus' kingdom centers on the liberation of the poor, building of community of sharing / redistribution or generalized reciprocity, the neo-Pentecostals focus on wealth acquisition, taking from the poor, and building negative reciprocity, a patron-client relations in society.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The basic reason for this research is to study the religious justification for some of the controversial teachings and practices of the neo-Pentecostals churches in Ghana. In doing this, I have also set out to examine the classical Pentecostals' views about the kingdom of God in order to ascertain the background of the study. The issue of particular concern is the prosperity gospel and the way money is being misused by the leaders of the neo-Pentecostal churches. And, as a nationwide prevailing issue since their emergence in the 1980's, Paul Gifford, in his book *Ghana's New Christianity*, echoed:

Ghanaians themselves view their new Christianity with some unease, and many have profound misgivings about it, sensing that it is socially dysfunctional... One editor says that all these new churches should have been 'one of the best things to have happened to Ghana, but unfortunately the reverse is the case.' The disquiet arises on several scores. There are frequent reports on sexual lapses by these new pastors... and about theft and fraud, particularly over visas... There are misgivings also about the effects of their teaching... Many think the faith gospel's prosperity emphasis is self-serving: 'The establishment of a "Christian" church has become the shortest route to raise oneself above the poverty line.'¹

It is evident today that a great deal of adherents and non-adherents of these new churches have expressed their displeasure towards the avarice life-style of the leaders. This includes amassing wealth, extorting from the poor and living expensively. One of the ways by which the individual Christian believer is taught as a means to socio-economic stability is to 'give' to the church. This doctrine of giving has really enriched these congregations and the leadership so much that one can easily see a sharp distinction between the rich and the poor in the same congregation. Ghana's media has not been silent on the issue.² *The Spectator*, a popular Ghanaian weekly

¹ See Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), pp. 191 – 192.

² Earlier on, before the Gifford's work, Divine Kumah, an editor, had aired his sentiment about the influx of the new prophets in *The Watchman*, a local Newspaper in Ghana, saying: 'The sudden rise in the use of titles, hitherto not

newspaper, had earlier on, lamented about the heightened desire of the contemporary prophets in extorting money from their clients.³ The paper, thus, warned the people to beware of these new prophets⁴ whose “prophetic ministry has become a big profession for all who want to make money.”⁵ Further, lamenting on the dangers the new Christianity can pose to the society, the web page of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation writes:

Ghana’s new religious Christian movement has assumed a complex kind of phenomenon which if not well handled, could create a chaotic situation and affect the moral fiber of society. Their messages now place tremendous emphasis on self esteem, ambition, confidence, power and miracles. The exploitative dimension that some of these new religious movements have assumed call for a more decisive way to have a more pragmatic approach as regard the constitutional provision of the right to practice any religion and manifest it. It is high time the entire citizenry declare religious crusade against the charlatans and the self imposters who defraud the gullible and exploit the flock in the name of religious freedom. The traditional Christian community should be able to adapt and to cope with the changing times by reviewing some of practices which tend to encourage people to move to the new faiths.⁶

The situation is ambivalent in the sense that whereas most neo-Pentecostal preachers overemphasize the importance of giving – tithing and offering – as an antidote to one’s chronic poverty and deliverance from demonic influence, others encourage diligence to work beside giving in their strive towards their wellbeing. Today, the impact of these neo-Pentecostal churches cuts across all facets of the nation and beyond – political, socio-economic and religion.

common to us, gets many people confused at sight... Now, all of a sudden, the title PROPHET is becoming the dominant one, only second to Bishop. Why everyone is becoming a Prophet now is just strange. Just sit by your TV set at the time of the evening’s announcements and you’ll not be able to count the number of Prophets.’ See David Stiles-Ocran, ‘Prophetism in Ghana: A Case Study of some Charismatic Churches’, an Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, University of Ghana (2004), p. 5; See also Divine P. Kumah, ‘The Prophetic “All-Nights” And Anointing For Sale’, *The Watchman* 18 (10 – 23 November, 1996).

³ *The Spectator*, 787, ISSN 0855 – 1499 Saturday, February 22 – 28, 2003, p. 2.

⁴ Cephas N. Omenyo, an Associate Professor in Church History at the Department for the Study of Religions at University of Ghana, sees the correlation between the neo-Pentecostals and the new Prophets. He relates: ‘The most recent stream of the Pentecostal movement in Ghana is a movement which, simply put, is a new manifestation of prophetism in contemporary African Christianity, hence the label “Neo-Prophetic” movement which has been assigned to it.’ Cephas N. Omenyo, “Man of God Prophesy Unto Me: The Prophetic Phenomenon in African Christianity”, *Studies in World Christianity* 17.1 (2011): 30 – 49, DOI: 10.3366/swc.2011.0004, Edinburgh University Press: www.eupjournals.com/swc: October 16, 2012, p. 40.

⁵ *The Spectator*, 787, ISSN 0855 – 1499 Saturday, February 22 – 28, 2003, p. 2. See also, David Stiles-Ocran, ‘Prophetism in Ghana’, p. 5.

⁶ Nicholas Asmah-Sey, “Commenting on Challenges of Religious Pluralism in a Democratic Constitution”, *Ghana Broadcasting Corporation*: <http://gbcghana.com/index.php?id=1.702844> – October 23, 2012.

In light of these accusations, I want to sketch the history of these churches and to investigate the preaching of the kingdom of God they claim to preach and how does that correspond with their praxis. And since the gospel has been turned into the gospel of money for themselves, as a student of religion, I want to measure the gospel of prosperity with Jesus' message of the kingdom of God.

Thus, the purpose of the study is, first, to discuss the various perceptions of the Kingdom of God in the neo-Pentecostal Christianity and, second, to evaluate the prosperity gospel and its impact on contemporary Christianity in Ghana as well as Africa. In doing this, I have set out to discuss the views of the classical Pentecostals on the kingdom of God, and also stated the position of the latter on gender which stands in sharp contrast to that of the neo-Pentecostals, The background of the study introduces that.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Christianity is one of the fastest growing religions in Africa today. In this regard Kwame Bediako⁷ arguing whether Christianity is suited to the African writes:

In an age when we have become accustomed to speaking of a shift in Christianity's centre of gravity from the Northern continents to the South, with Africa having pride of place of this shift, it might seem paradoxical that a book in Christianity in African life should begin by asking if Christianity is in fact suited to the Africans. By all accounts, one could say, as indeed John Mbiti has asserted, that 'the Christian way of life is in Africa to stay, certainly within the foreseeable future.'⁸

It is interesting to note that Bediako, being a native of Ghana and resident in the same land, wrote from that perspective and context. Ghana is noted for the unprecedented growth of Christianity, especially, the classical and the neo-Pentecostal Christianity.

⁷ Kwame Bediako, from Ghana, was an African theologian and one of Africa's leading Christian interpreters of Africa and of African Christianity.

⁸ See Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 3. He has further reiterated the same point of the shift saying 'the heartland of the Christian faith are no longer found in the Western world, but in the non-Western world; not in the northern continents, but in the southern continents of Latin America, Asia and particularly Africa ... By any account, Africa has become a heartland of the Christian faith in our time.' See Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), p. 1.

The classical Pentecostalism was noted for their extreme spirituality and their futuristic abstract minded concept of the kingdom of God in term of doctrines. Their priority was the conversion of the individual from other religions (particularly, the indigenous religion) to Christianity and the person's orientation towards "going to heaven". In their earlier stages of the upsurge of this form of Christianity, politics was more of the *world* and profane, and the Christian believer was not supposed to meddle in the affairs of it. They perceived the urgency of the coming kingdom of God and the need to warn the world against the doom's day. As a result of their emphasis, the majority of the adherents were said to be of poor status; and due to the urgency of the soon coming kingdom, there was little encouragement to break away from the poverty cycle. The detailed discussion of the views of the classical Pentecostals on the kingdom of God is presented in chapter three.

Furthermore, Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana as well as Africa, for some decades, has also been noted for its exclusive emphasis on the "Spirit". It 'depicts a God who does not remain aloof but reaches down through the power of the Spirit to touch human hearts in the midst of life's turmoil.'⁹ The adherents of the latter felt genuine Christianity ought to acknowledge and allow the Spirit to dominate every aspect of the church as well as the individual believers' life. They were also, with the presence of the Spirit in them, characterized with exorcisms, healings, exuberant worship and the like. Gerrie ter Haar has noted that 'Pentecostalism has reintroduced in the Western church a type of spirituality which had never been totally absent but which, over a long period, had become increasingly marginal to the life of the church.'¹⁰ That, in the eyes of the believers, 'pentecostalism has restored to the Christian community the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so long denied by the mainline churches which considered these to have ceased to operate at the end of the first century.'¹¹

It is also interesting to see that, in classical Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana, there is a large gender inequality. Most of the leadership of these denominations is extremely male dominated. For instance, in the Church of Pentecost, one of the earliest and biggest classical Pentecostal churches, the General Council – the highest policy making of the Church – is 'made up of all

⁹ See Harvoy Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1995), p. 5.

¹⁰ See Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians Europe* (Britain: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists and ordained Pastors of the Church, Area Executive Members, National Deacons, Trustees, Chairmen of Boards and Committees and Movement General Leaders or Director(s).¹² Now, the point is that, among these people, only one person is a female, that is, the Women's Movement Director, all others are males. Further discussion on gender in the classical Pentecostal churches is presented in the chapter three of the study.

Since the emergence of the neo-Pentecostalism, there is a large paradigm shift from such an abstract doctrinal orientation – *a pie in the sky* – of the kingdom of God to a down-to-earth one – *here and now* – It appears to influence both the classical Pentecostal Churches as well as the other Christian denominations.

Paul Gifford notes that 'nobody in Ghana is unaware of the shift. Everybody is aware of charismatic prayer centres, their all-night services ..., their crusades, conventions and Bible schools, their new buildings (or the schools, cinemas and halls they rent), their car bumper stickers and banners, and particularly the posters that everywhere advertise an enormous range of forthcoming activities.'¹³ The neo-Pentecostal Christianity is visible in the country – in politics, socio-economic developments and the like. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu's¹⁴ major premise for his research on current developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana was that 'Pentecostalism is the area in which the growth in African Christianity has been most conspicuous.'¹⁵

Ghana's new Christianity has enormously extended Pentecostal spirituality to embrace the socio-economic well-being of the Christian believer as well as the church as a whole. Wealth acquisition, in the name of prosperity gospel, has extended from faith-claims to acquiring of skills to make wealth, hence the proliferation of private educational institutions from crèche to tertiary level. Acquiring wealth through 'giving' by the members of the congregation and business by the 'church' is the order of the day. The sudden shift in emphasis to a competitive

¹² See the Church of Pentecost's Constitution (2005), p. 8.

¹³ See Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), pp. 23 – 24.

¹⁴ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu is an ordained minister of the Methodist Church Ghana and a Professor of Contemporary African Christianity and Pentecostal/Charismatic Theology in Africa at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra, Ghana.

¹⁵ See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 10.

wealth acquisition by these new congregations is marked by the new wave of emphasis on the meaning of Jesus' kingdom of God – 'the here and now' kingdom life.

Also, the neo-Pentecostal churches, to a large extent compared to the classical Pentecostal Churches, have able to be sensitive to gender equality. The leadership of these churches are mostly made up husband and wife (as senior pastors or co-founders as they put it), ordained women and men, and even in some cases, women are seen as sole founders or leaders of their denominations.

METHODOLOGY

I have employed historical, ethnographical, systematic and contextual models in the study. Suitable models are used appropriately from the primary to secondary sources to evaluate the findings all within contextual theology¹⁶ perspectives. The various discussions, particularly, centre on a contextual approach to the praxis of the kingdom of God within the community of the neo-Pentecostal adherents and in this case Ghana. This is due to the fact that the Pentecostal / Charismatic Christianity encountered in this study stress the experience¹⁷ and praxis aspects of their faith rather than the theology of it. And the praxis model of contextual theology is 'a model the central insight of which is that theology is done not simply by providing relevant expressions of Christian faith but also by commitment to Christian action.'¹⁸ The neo-Pentecostals stress on what can be said to be inexplicable experience, yet a liberating one. Thus, the liberating factor of their experiences becomes the starting point of theology. This is basically the perspective from which I present this study. This is due to the fact that my context – Ghana and Africa – was

¹⁶ Stephen B. Bevans has argued that 'doing theology contextually means doing theology in ways that takes into accounts two things. First, it takes into account the faith experience of the past that is recorded in scriptures and kept alive, preserved, defended – and perhaps even neglected or suppressed – in tradition ... Second, contextual theology takes into account the experience of the present, the context.' See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), p. 5.

¹⁷ Cox has come to the conclusion that Pentecostal movement places 'persistent accent on personal experience as the *sine qua non* of spirituality and the indispensable touchstone of faith'. See Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Da Capo Press, 1995), p. 310. It is still the case that the meaning of such experience is unclear. Cox stressed that 'Pentecostals like to talk about *experience* a lot ... without being very precise about what they mean.' Harvey Cox, pp. 312 – 313. Also, Asamoah-Gyadu has also alluded to the fact that 'Pentecostalism is a stream of Christianity that emphasizes experience and so those who seek "membership" do not have to go through a catechism.' J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, p. 12.

¹⁸ See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Culture*, p. 72.

plagued with the colonial injustices which led to what Sobrino refers to as historical suffering, 'the major suffering in today's world... suffering unjustly inflicted on some by others.'¹⁹

I concur with Sobrino that, in the midst of this historical suffering, any form of intellectual exercise must primarily aim at eliminating this type of suffering.²⁰ Thus, though, the study looks at the phenomenon critically, it is also sensitive to the historical context of the players involved. In view of this, the historical context of Ghana and that of the Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity has been assessed in the work.

The main ethnographic tools I used in gathering the primary data are interviews and participant observation. I interviewed nine people who include seven pastors and two elders between the months of June and August 2012. Again, seven of the interviewees are neo-Pentecostal adherents whilst the other two belong to the classical Pentecostal denomination (specifically, the Church of Pentecost). The individual pastors and elders as well as the Bible Study groups chosen for the study represents both classical and neo- Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana. The majority (seven) of the people belong to the Koforidua²¹ United Christian Ministers' Fellowship (KUCMF), a network of Pastors with different denominations of neo-Pentecostal Christianity found in several regions of Ghana. The other two are from the Church of Pentecost²², an indigenous African Independent classical Pentecostal Church with branches almost all over the world with the international headquarters in Ghana. The latter is also a member of the Ghana Pentecostal Council which serves as the umbrella body of all the classical Pentecostal denominations in the country.

I also conducted two separate contextual bible studies. Contextual Bible study, according Gerald West, enables us to 'explore how trained and ordinary readers can work together to read the Bible in an individually and socially transformed way'²³ in their own context. West further

¹⁹ See Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 29. Sobrino further explains that 'Historical suffering is massive, affecting the majority of humanity, making it practically impossible for people to direct their own lives, causing poverty that brings death slowly and violently.'

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Koforidua is the Eastern Regional capital of Ghana with branches of almost all churches in Ghana.

²² Omenyo has indicated that the Church of Pentecost is 'the largest and the fastest growing classical Pentecostal church in Ghana'. See Cephas N. Omenyo, 'Man of God Prophecy Unto Me: The Prophetic Phenomenon in African Christianity', p. 36.

²³ See Gerald West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Dorpspruit: Cluster Publications, 1993), p. 9.

argues that, from South African context, ‘those who are committed to the Contextual Bible Study process have decided to read Bible from a particular perspective... the perspective of the poor and oppressed.’²⁴ Text from Luke’s gospel (14: 1 – 17) formed the basis of the study. Luke’s gospel is preferred due to some social themes of concern I investigated in Ghana’s new Christianity, namely, money, giving and banquet or food. In addition, ‘Luke is primarily concerned with human beings as actors in social and economic interaction.’²⁵ This approach is significant because the views of the marginalized lay people have aided me to know the extent to which the phenomenon, though attractive to most people, is also oppressive. The approach has also helped in understanding the social relations that exist in the community of the neo-Pentecostals in Ghana.

I also participated in and observed some of the worship services of the neo-Pentecostals during the research and being a Pentecostal and Charismatic adherent I had less difficulty in doing that. Indeed, participant observation has its pros and cons. Sal Watt and Julie Scott Jones have identified, in the contemporary times, three membership roles in observational research, namely, ‘the *peripheral*, *active* and *complete membership*.’²⁶ The *peripheral membership* role has to do with the ‘researcher engaging with the group and establishing “insider” identity.’²⁷ In other words, here, the researcher participates in the groups’ activities but do not get involved in their inner connectives or the core values.²⁸ In the *active membership* role, the researcher participates in the group’s activities and even in the core values but never gets committed fully to them.²⁹ The *complete membership* role fully engages the researcher’s participation in the group’s activities and assumes a full commitment to their inner connectives.

In this study, I stand in between the active and complete membership roles. My background as a neo-Pentecostal and evangelical adherent, an insider, advantageously enabled me to participate in the worship services of the group without having a feeling of a stranger and also ascribed to

²⁴ See West, *Contextual Bible Study*, p. 13. West further explains that the ‘poor and the oppressed are those who are socially, politically, economically, or culturally marginalized and exploited.’ See pp. 13 - 14

²⁵ See Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 123.

²⁶ See Sal Watt and Julie Scott Jones, “Let’s Look Inside”, in *Ethnography in Social Science Practice* Edited by Julie Scott Jones and Sal Swatt (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 112.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See Zorodzai Dube, ‘Storytelling in times of violence’, a PhD Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo (September 2011), p. 90.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Also, see Watt and Jones, “Let’s Look Inside”, p. 112.

their core values. Having known me as one of them and also told them about the purpose of my study, the interviewees did not hold back or hesitate to respond to my questions. However, my position as a student of religion aided me to observe their core values and take a critical stance on it as demonstrated in the study – critiquing of the prosperity gospel.

It is also significant to point out some of the cons of the standing in between the active and complete membership roles. The first point is the challenge of familiarity. I was tempted several times to assume knowledge of some aspects and so did not make the effort to ask about the views of the interviewees, and in most cases when I cross checked from the latter the findings were different from what I had assumed I am familiar with. Also, as an insider, I could not avoid the challenge of being bias that may have occurred in the reporting and interpreting the findings.³⁰

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study is structured into seven chapters. The chapter one, *the General Introduction*, spells out the theoretical framework of the study. It presents that purpose of study, background of the study, methods of the study, the scope of the study, the organization of chapters, and the relevance of this study.

Chapter two, *From Gold Coast to Ghana: Historical and Socio-Religious Context*, presents briefly the Ancient Ghana Empire, the Pre-Colonial Gold Coast, The Colonization of Gold Coast, Colonization and Evangelization, Freedom from the Colonial Rule, Kwame Nkrumah as an African Liberator, and Post Independence of Ghana. The chapter also discusses *the sociological description of the church in Ghana* mainly which includes a statistical situation of Christianity or religion in Ghana and a typology of the church in Ghana.

Chapter three of the study introduces *the Mission of Jesus and the Kingdom of God*. It is a presentation of the various views of both the classical and the neo-Pentecostals on the Kingdom of God. The outline of the discussion includes perceptions about the mission of Jesus, what the kingdom of God is, and gender and the kingdom of God.

³⁰ See Dube, 'Storytelling in times of violence', p. 92.

Chapter four, *the Church and the Poor*, presents the various views of the Pentecostal Christians in Ghana. The chapter deals with how the neo-Pentecostal churches care for the poor, the social relations in the church. It further presents the neo-Pentecostals' understanding of the meaning of poverty, the causes of poverty, and how one can overcome poverty.

Chapter five, *The Gospel of Prosperity and the Functioning of the neo-Pentecostal Leaders*, presents the origins or the source of influence of the prosperity gospel on Ghana's Christianity; why the prosperity gospel teaching is welcomed by most people? And what are the implications of the prosperity gospel on the society as whole? The chapter also discusses the prosperity gospel in context and its significance in Ghana, and criticizes the functioning of the neo-Pentecostal leaders.

Chapter six, under the sub-heading *Thy Kingdom Come: the Concept and the praxis of the Kingdom of God in Ghana's New Christianity*, presents a systematic comprehensive view of Jesus' kingdom of God. The chapter looks at Post-colonial Perspectives of the kingdom of God, Characteristics of the kingdom of God, Jesus' kingdom of God and the Poor, and the challenge to Ghanaian Christianity.

Chapter seven, *Concluding Remarks: Relating Jesus' Kingdom of God to Ghana's New Christianity*, is the final chapter which briefly presents some outcomes of the study.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This research deals with some of the theological issues regarding the practices of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana as well as Africa. It is therefore an attempt to address praxis of the gospel of Jesus – the kingdom of God – within the context of Ghana and Africa at large. The research serves a foundation for future systematic theology of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and its influence on Christianity worldwide.

It is therefore important to note that, in agreement with a South African proverb which says that *For as long as lions fail to have their own historians, history will always be written by hunters*, this research is another attempt for Africans to evaluate Christianity within the context of the host indigenous religions. This gesture enables us to realize the harmonies or commonalities of

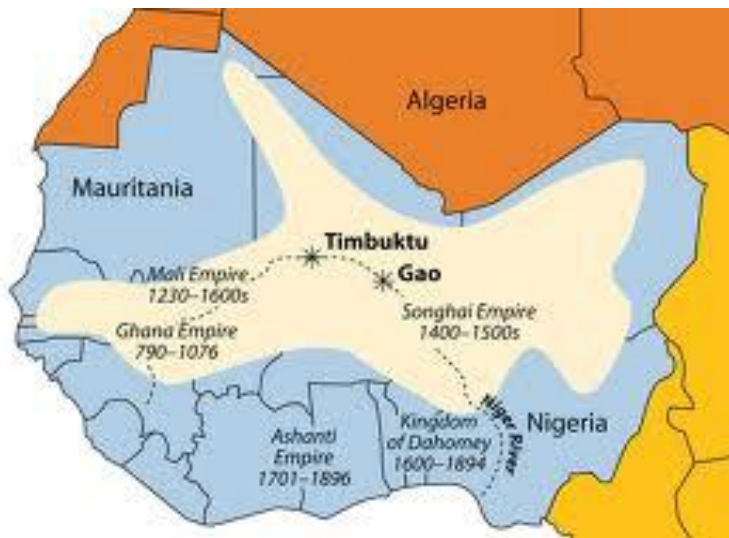
the two religious traditions – African Traditional Religions and Christianity. Therefore, as an African and not only that but also a Pentecostal / Charismatic and evangelical Christian, I have the privilege to examine critically the gospel that was preached to us by colonial and imperial missionaries, how the gospel as received and how the gospel has been contextualized in the contemporary times. Specifically, the study also presents a comprehensive view of Jesus' kingdom of God and its misrepresentations in Ghanaian Christianity.

Chapter 2

FROM GOLD COAST TO GHANA: HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

The present day Ghana has had a long standing history that goes back to the pre-colonial times when we had the Ghana Empire beside other African empires. In order to make the prevailing religious situation presented in this study understandable, this chapter introduces brief reflections on pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial political, socio-economic and religious setting of the Gold Coast (now Ghana). The discussion does not follow strict chronological order and precision, it is, for the purpose of the study, a selection from some available written sources. I have chosen to relate, in this chapter, a brief sketch about the Ancient Ghana; Pre-Colonial Gold Coast; the Colonization of Gold Coast; Colonization and Evangelization; Freedom from the Colonial Rule; Kwame Nkrumah; and the Post Independence of Ghana. The chapter also closes



with the sociological description of the church in Ghana. The significance of this presentation is to enable us to comprehend the effect of both socio-economic and political history on the contemporary interpretation of the kingdom of God by the church.

Table 3: The Main ancient Empires of West Africa.³¹

³¹ This map was taken from the Google web page:

<http://www.google.no/search?q=asante+empire&hl=en&prmd=imvns&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=YDqiULOhCtON4gTzh4CYCg&sqi=2&ved=0CCKQsAQ&biw=800&bih=497> – (Assessed on 13 November 2012).

THE ANCIENT GHANA EMPIRE

The Ancient Ghana was the first of three successive empires or kingdoms – Ghana, Mali, and Songhay – in the Ancient Africa, specifically, West Africa. The Ancient Ghana Empire occupied the modern day Southern Senegal and Southern Mauritania.³² Some sources have suggested that the term *Ghana* was a title for the kings that ruled the Ancient Empire called Wagadu.³³ It has also been suggested that the ancient Ghana was mainly made up the Soninke people a Mande speaking people of the Niger-Congo family. This kingdom lasted from 750 A.D. to 1200 A.D.³⁴

Economically, the ancient Ghana Empire was very rich in gold and camels. In fact, the Empire was described as ‘the “land of gold” for its role as an economic intermediary within the gold trade from south to north.’³⁵ This, probably, made the Empire enviable, attacked and defeated by the Mali Empire which also built on the monopolization of trade, and stayed in power 1200 AD and 1500 AD.³⁶

History also points to the fact that around the period of these ancient kingdoms, the modern land of Ghana was occupied by an ancient people known as the Ashanti Kingdom, mainly dominated by Akan who are believed to have migrated from the Ancient Ghana³⁷, which leads us to the history of Pre-Colonial Gold Coast. The following map of Historical Ghana³⁸ shows the location of Mali and Ashanti Empires.

³² See Britannica Online Encyclopedia: <http://www.britannica.com/search?query=ghana+empire+in+west+africa> – (Assessed on 28 November 2012).

³³ See Patricia and Frederick McKissack, *The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), p. 6.

³⁴ See Britannica Online Encyclopedia: <http://www.britannica.com/search?query=ghana+empire+in+west+africa> – (Assessed on 28 November 2012).

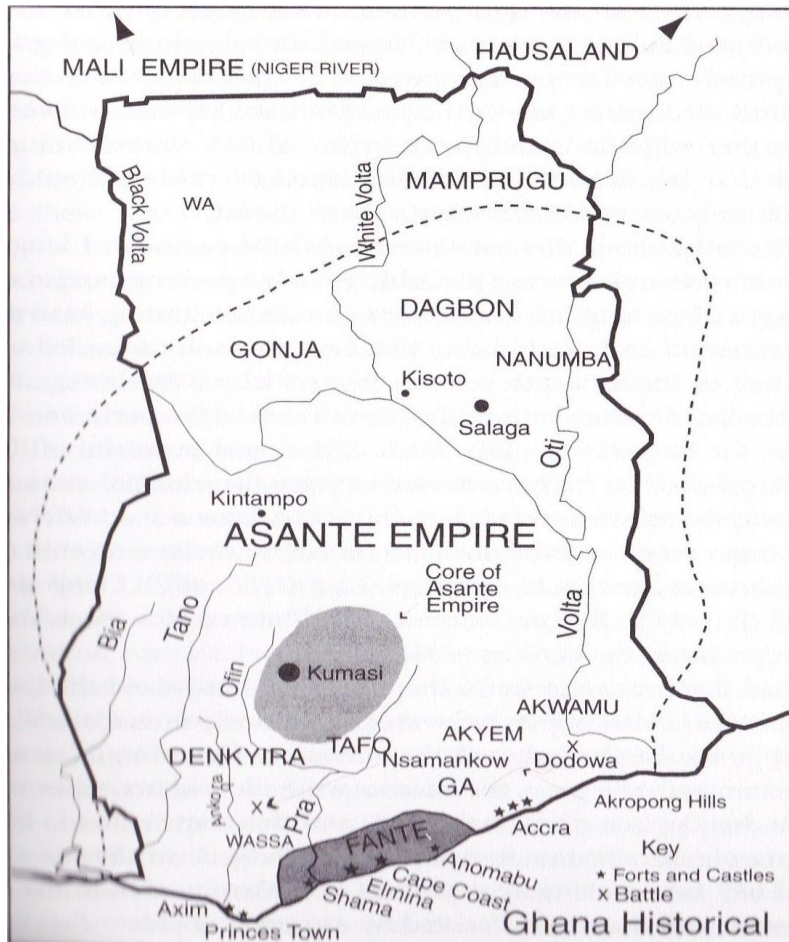
³⁵ See George Appiah, “Ancient Ghana: Discover the Rich History of the Old Ghana Empire” on the webpage: <http://www.ghanatraveller.com/ancient-ghana.html> - (Assessed on 12 November 2012).

³⁶ See Patricia and Frederick McKissack, *The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa*, p. 43.

³⁷ See Roger S. Gocking, *The History of Ghana* (London: Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 17.

³⁸ See Roger S. Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, p. 19.

PRE-COLONIAL GOLD COAST



James Anquandah³⁹, cited by Gocking, has argued that the

Old Ghana had two faces. One face looked towards the middle Niger and Hausaland (present-day northern Nigeria) and the trans-Saharan caravan routes which linked West Africa with Roman and Islamic north Africa and north-east Africa. The other face looked southward towards the maritime coast, the scene of contact with the commercial representatives of several European nations.⁴⁰

The name Gold Coast was given by the early European traders, the Portuguese, who landed on the coast of the then Ashanti Empire, particularly, because of the abundant of gold they found

at the place. The exact origin of the people of Gold Coast is not certain. Some historians have suggested that they might have had their root in Benin, 'Togo, Dahomey, Yorubaland, and even the Biblical land of Canaan'⁴¹.

Gold Coast, as noted earlier, was "discovered" by the Portuguese who arrived on the Coast of Guinea as the first Europeans in 1471, and having discovered much gold, built their first fortress and named it "da Mina" or Elmina meaning the Mine.⁴² Their main aim was to trade for gold, ivory and slaves. Through the barter system of trade, the latter items were taken by the

³⁹ James Acquandah is one of the leading Ghanaian archaeologist and professor at the Department of Archaeology, University of Ghana, Legon.

⁴⁰ See Roger S. Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, p. 18. Gocking cited from James Acquandah, *Rediscovering Ghana's Past* (Harlow, United Kingdom: Longman Group, 1982), pp. 126 – 27.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁴² See Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, p. 25.

Portuguese and given in exchange, ‘textiles, copper- and brass-ware, iron bars, and iron products.’⁴³ To ease the carriage of their products to the coast, the Portuguese started buying slaves for that of which some were exchange for gold at the gold mining centres in Gold Coast, whilst others were sent to Portugal.⁴⁴

The Portuguese fortress was captured by the Dutch in 1637 who had also built forts at Komenda and Kwomante (1598). In the mid 18th century, other European traders – British, Danes and Swedes – also joined and dotted the coastline by forts. The Danish, being the last to arrive in 1660, built the fort “Christianborg” also known as the Osu Castle which became the home of the Danish governor and later the centre for Danish slave trade.⁴⁵

The commerce in gold and slaves, within a short period, attracted several Europeans (The Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, France and Denmark) who saturated the Gold Coast with fortifications – Elmina by the English at Cape Coast, Fort Crévecoeur by the Dutch and James Fort by the English, both in Accra, among others.⁴⁶ By the latter part of 19th century the Dutch and the British were the only traders left. And when the Dutch withdrew in 1874, the British made the Gold Coast a crown colony.

The major trade allies of the Europeans were the Ashanti leaders. The Ashanti gained advantage over her surroundings because of the possession of firearms ‘which were imported from Europeans on the coast.’⁴⁷ The major religion of the people of Gold Coast was the indigenous religion and some traces of Islam imported by Muslim traders from the North.

⁴³ See Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 26 – 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 21.

THE COLONIZATION OF GOLD COAST

When the Gold Coast became a colony of the British, the Ashanti Empire maintained their political influence or power until the defeat in 1874.⁴⁸ Omenyo recounts that

In 1821, the era of mercantile relations between Ghana's seaboard societies and Britain ended by British Parliament abolishing the chartered company running the English forts and having the British Crown take possession of them. The informal British jurisdiction which the first British governor of these forts, Captain George Maclean, established in much of the coastal region was acknowledged by a number of Fante and other chiefs signing the Bond of 1844.⁴⁹

Thus, it took a while for the British to totally overpower the Ashanti kingdom as well as her surroundings after several battles. The Ashanti land was finally declared a British colony in 1902.⁵⁰ Henceforth, the British, having assumed the full political power over the Gold Coast and Ashanti, started implementing their civilization through administering of English Common law and education.

COLONIZATION AND EVANGELIZATION

Gocking had noted that 'There had always been a link between Christian proselytizing and the spread of Western education, and rapidly the nineteenth-century missionaries expanded this connection.'⁵¹ The various chaplains, who had accompanied their troops to the coast, saw the need to share the gospel with the indigenous people. The initial attempts to spread the gospel were not very successful due to the practice of the slave trade. The natives, possibly, could synchronize the preaching of freedom or salvation in the gospel with the practice of the slave trade which inflicted pain and suffering on the victims and their families. Gocking suggests this possibility in the following:

Of great long-term significance was the impact of Christianity. Initially the Portuguese made significant efforts to spread Catholicism, and soon after their settlement at Elmina there were over 1,300 baptized Catholics in the town. In 1573 six Augustinian friars were sent from Portugal to expand this effort, but after some initial success the people of Komenda and Eguafu attacked and killed most of the monks. Perhaps it

⁴⁸ See Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 15.

⁵¹ See Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, p. 29.

was the incompatibility of slave trading and proselytizing that doomed this effort. Neither did the unhealthy nature of the coast for Europeans argue well for missionary efforts into the interior, and for most of the era of the transatlantic slave trade, Christian proselytizing was confined to the forts and castles and their populations.⁵²

The missionaries were not only met with human hostility but also unfavorable weather conditions. Most of them died prematurely through mosquito bites.⁵³ Having thought that the possibly best way to get the gospel effectively communicated to the people was to use the natives themselves, the missionaries trained some local people to take leadership position in the church. The first were ‘Elisa Johannes Capitein of Elmina, Christian Protten of Christiansborg, and Philip Quaque of Cape Coast.’⁵⁴ The gospel was perceived as a means by which Western civilization was imposed on the people, and the result was the destruction of the indigenous culture as well as the loss of identity through the giving of Christian names.

The early missionary agencies in the then Gold Coast, whose works are still evident in Ghana today, were the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society (1828), the Wesleyan Missionaries (1835), and the Catholic Societas Missionum ad Afros (SMA, 1880).⁵⁵

Another possible reason for the initial unsuccessful nature of the spread of the gospel was the condemnation of the African traditional religious beliefs and practices. The early missionaries looked down upon the traditional religion ‘as heathen, pagan, primitive, unscientific and the superstitious beliefs of uncultured people.’⁵⁶ However, the indigenous people who were educated by the colonial government eventually became the leaders of the freedom fighters. They began to ask for self-governance or majority inclusion in the colonial government. The educated élites also, as an ultimate goal, sought to obtain independence for the Gold Coast.⁵⁷ In fact, Ebenezer Obiri Addo, a Ghanaian scholar, relates that a ‘national liberation movement with a broad base was therefore necessary. In such a movement, however, intellectual elites in the name of the

⁵² See Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, pp. 28 – 29.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ See Jones Darkwa Amonor, “Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African reformation”, by *Cyberjournal For Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 13. <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj13/amanor.pdf> (Assessed on 29 April 2012).

⁵⁷ See Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, p. 15.

masses with a double legitimacy as successors to pre-colonial leaders and as spokespersons for the general will.⁵⁸

THE IMPACT OF THE PRE-COLONIAL SLAVE TRADE AND COLONIALISM ON CONTEMPORARY GHANA

The economic poor state of most African countries, like Ghana, today can arguably be attributed to the pain inflicted by pre-colonial slave trade and colonialism. As briefly indicated, the pre-colonial Ghana and the Ashanti Empires were rich in gold, camel, ivory, and the like. Their riches attracted trade partners from all over the world. They had their own governing system and the farming communities cultivated the soil to feed themselves and also exchanged the residue for what they did not have or what they could not produce.

With the introduction of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, the strong and productive men and women were taken from their families and the majority were transported beyond the ocean to Europe, to America, and to places far away from their homelands – places where they could not easily trace their way to return to the homeland. This practice left families, communities, and countries of Africa totally impoverished. The feeble remnant had to struggle to take care of the rest of their families, a struggle which is ongoing till today in many societies in Africa. Indeed, the perpetrators of this practice – slave trade – were not only the Europeans but also the local leaders of the indigenous people. Out of greed, the local chiefs concurred to sell out their best people. No wonder, the sufferings of today do not necessary affect the leaders. As the custodians of the little resources of the land, most leaders of African countries and communities enrich themselves and live comfortably at the expense of the poor. The leaders do not redistribute.

Whereas the practice of pre-colonial slave trade denied the families and the countries of manpower and mental or psychological capabilities, colonialism siphoned from the colonized the rich resources – gold, timber, cocoa and the like. This is the bedrock of Africans' aggressive quest to prosper economically. This has affected all facets of African life. As hinted at in the previous paragraph, most leaders from both political and religious walls have a high tendency to

⁵⁸ See Ebenezer Obiri Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1997), p. 82.

amass wealth by unwholesome means and keep them for personal ventures. This attitude of quest for riches has entered into the church, particularly, the contemporary Christianity in Ghana as well as other parts of West Africa.

Thus, the pre-colonial slave trade and colonialism have negatively impacted Africans' psychological orientations and attitude towards riches and leadership. There is the prevailing concept of the survival of the fittest; it is the strong that rules and enjoy life to the detriment of the weak, the poor. The behavior of most leaders of these communities can be likened to the story of the rich fool who had plenty harvest, boated about it and planned to use it selfishly – he failed to redistribute the harvest. Colonialism, thus, created the plague of “negative reciprocity”⁵⁹ in African leadership. For instance, in the primitive societies of Ghana, the primary role of the chief was to gather the taxes on the produce of the land for redistribution, especially, among the feeble families – there was a sense of belonging and communalism and the chief was the herald of it. The colonial masters used the African people as well as the leaders for their advantage, there was nothing like mutual benefit – it was a clear exploitation. This historical suffering has led to an insatiable quest for material prosperity, a menace within the contemporary Christian leaders in Ghana as well as in most West African countries. Independence from colonialism has not yet offered a way out of the menace.

INDEPENDENCE: FREEDOM FROM THE COLONIAL RULE

It has been a long struggle, historians and other disciplines of interest tell us, after the Gold Coast became a British colony. The freedom of the indigenous people were violated and trodden down through force labour and siphoning of national resources like gold, cocoa, timber and the like to Britain and other parts of Europe. There was also exploitation⁶⁰ as well as loss of cultural identity. After several agitations for freedom by the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) led by Dr. J. B. Danquah, the Convention Peoples' Party under the leadership of Dr. Kwame

⁵⁹ “Negative reciprocity”, according to Marshall Sahlins, ‘is the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity, the several forms of appropriation, transactions opened and conducted toward net utilitarian advantage.’ See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 195. See also Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1973), p. 34.

⁶⁰ Roger S. Gocking has argued, for instance, that ‘A spectacular rise in the price of cocoa was the catalyst that was to spark what were already rumblings of discontent. *The History of Ghana*, p. 104.

Nkrumah, led the people of Gold Coast to freedom and independence in 1957.⁶¹ At that point the name *Ghana* was preferred to Gold Coast to mark the first new born independent nation in West Africa. For the purpose of this study, let us look at some aspects of the life and politics of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, who is also known as the liberator of Africa.

KWAME NKRUMAH: AN AFRICAN LIBERATOR

Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (1909 – 1972), hailed from Nkrofor – Nzema of the Western Region of Ghana and became the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana after championing the fight for total freedom of the country. His agenda was more of freedom in poverty than riches in slavery.⁶² Nkrumah imported lots of religious imagery in his political quests for freedom for the people of Ghana and beyond. Addo has argued that ‘Nkrumah created a new kind of political religion called “Nkrumaism,” and a political ideology he termed “consciencism,” both of which became major sources of friction between his regime and the Christian church.’⁶³ He further asserts that ‘Nkrumah’s rapid rise from obscurity to political fame made him a symbol of liberation for Africa in general and for Ghana in particular.’⁶⁴

Kwame Nkrumah is also said to have called on the people to seek the political kingdom of Ghana as well as of Africa. Addo relates that ‘Nkrumah affirmed the priority of his brand of nationalism by his famous statement, “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto you.”’⁶⁵ Here, we see how our political leaders draw from the existing religious ideas to formulate their own political tenets. Nkrumah definitely drew from the Christian scriptural reference, Matthew 6: 33, to form his basic political orientation.

⁶¹ See Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, p. 15. See also detailed historical accounts by Roger S. Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, pp. 104 – 112.

⁶² See Roger S. Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, p. 126. Gocking quotes the as having preferred “poverty in freedom to opulence in slavery”.

⁶³ See Ebenezer Obiri Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1997), p.3.

⁶⁴ See Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah*, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 82.

At the first Pan-African Conference held in Accra, the regional capital of Ghana, in December 8, 1958, Kwame Nkrumah is said to have explained further about what he meant by Political Kingdom in the following words:

My advice to you who are struggling to be free is to aim for the attainment of the Political Kingdom – that is to say, the complete independence and self-determination of your territories. When you have achieved the Political Kingdom, all else will follow. Only with the acquisition of political power – real power through the attainment of sovereign independence – will you be in a position to reshape ‘your lives and destiny: only then will you be able to resolve the vexatious problems which harass our continent.’⁶⁶

Here, Nkrumah’s religious and political ideologies were developed and impacted in the young people of Ghana so much that, in those days, the people saw him as the Messiah of Ghana as well as of the African continent. The leaders of Nkrumaism raised and indoctrinated the Ghana Young Pioneers (GYP), the youth wing of the CPP, with the main aim of making Kwame Nkrumah popular in the country, Africa, and the world at large. For instance, the GYP had a daily recitation code and pledge which reads as follows:

- I sincerely promise to live by the ideals of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Founder of the State of Ghana and Initiator of the African Personality.
- To safeguard by all means possible, the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State of Ghana from internal and external aggression.
- To be always in the vanguard for the social and economic reconstruction of Ghana and Africa.
- To be in the first ranks of men fighting for the total liberation and unity of Africa, for these are noble aims guiding the Ghana Young Pioneers.
- As a Young Pioneer, I will be a guard of workers, farmers, co-operatives and all the other sections of our community.
- I believe that the dynamic CPP is always Supreme and I promise to be worthy of its ideals.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah*, p. 83.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 143 – 144. Gocking also asserts that ‘The hero worship of Nkrumah that its youthful members practiced, to the point of deifying him and proclaiming him their Messiah, scandalized large segments of Ghana’s Christian and religious population.’ See Roger S. Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, p. 133.

The people of Ghana as well as Africa, at the time, saw Kwame Nkrumah as their Messiah. And Addo presents what the Evening News of October 23, 1961 purported to be a detailed explanation of the phrase “Nkrumah is our Messiah”:

Nkrumah is our Messiah. Whoever sees his brothers need and supplies it – not by casting of the discarded garment to him – but by giving him a moral and spiritual standard by which he shall live; that is the Messiah, the Saviour, the Christ. From time to time, individuals have caught the glimpses of the Christ or the true idea of God. Long before Jesus Christ, were men like Moses, Joshua, Elisha, etc. who demonstrated the true idea of sonship. This demonstration by no means ended with Jesus. Why? Karl Marx demonstrated the Christ, and so did Lenin of USSR, Ghandi of India, Mao of China and in our midst is Kwame Nkrumah. When our history is recored, the man Kwame Nkrumah will be written of as the Liberator, the Messiah, the Christ of our day, whose great love for mankind wrought changes in Ghana, in Africa and in the world at large.⁶⁸

It is interesting to note the genesis of the liberation ideology of Africa.⁶⁹ It all started with Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and spread throughout the continent of Africa. Nkrumah’s nationalistic ideals translated the message of the Christian pursuit of the kingdom of God into the context of human suffering under colonialism and called for paradigm shift at the time. Much as Nkrumah’s political ideologies were opposed by the church in some respect, he as well as the early freedom fighters were not bothered by that since they also ‘saw the church as first and foremost an ally of colonialism, the church functioned as a sacred canopy that baptized the activists of the colonial government.’⁷⁰

Kwame Nkrumah’s political leadership, though coupled with serious flaws, became the foundation of politics in Ghana as well as the nations of Africa. His political leadership style can best be described as dictatorship. He was power-drunk and sought to make Ghana a one-party state, a goal which did not materialize but created a negative precedence for other political leaders of the country and other nations of Africa. Paul Gifford, with insights from the BBC, describes Nkrumah in the following words:

⁶⁸ See Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah*, p. 144.

⁶⁹ ‘Nkrumah always had a passionate interest in African unity, and his pursuit of this goal contributed to his increasing ideological radicalization. The political struggles with the NLM had forced this dream to take a back seat, but soon after independence he was proclaiming that the “independence of Ghana was meaningless unless it was linked up with the total liberation of the African continent.” He quickly set out to realize this goal and to put Ghana in the forefront of this struggle.’ See Roger S. Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, p. 125.

⁷⁰ See Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah*, p. 127.

The first President ... was Kwame Nkrumah, perhaps Africa's most famous son, who in December 1999 topped a BBC poll as the African of the millennium. He was identified with anti-colonialism, black pride and the African personality, Pan-Africanism, African unity, and industrialization. He is still widely revered in Ghana, and political parties vie to claim his mantle, but it is also undeniable that he pioneered many of those qualities that have become the bane of African politics: 'big man' rule, the personality cult, corruption and disregard of the rule of law.⁷¹

After being accused of dictatorship, corruption, over ambition, and lack of economic growth, Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown in a military coup in 1966 and was succeeded by Kofi Busia (1972 – 8).⁷² This is the foundational political context of Ghana and rest of African nations – the challenge of love of power and abuse of political power by politicians. How significant is the ideology of Kwame Nkrumah to the discourse of the Kingdom of God in Ghana's new Christianity?

Nkrumah's cohesive stand against the church at his time was due to the fact that, to him, the then church and colonialism were bedmates and that the church was agent of the spread of colonial civilization. The missionaries had condemned the indigenous African religion as primitive, barbaric, superstitious, demonic and uncivilized. The traditional religious practices like libation was outlawed and no longer allowed in public gatherings. Nkrumah, on the contrary, sought to revive and promote the traditional religious values in his leadership and expected Ghanaians to cherish them. He had different understanding when it came to the gospel.

Nkrumah perceived that the gospel made no distinction between the sacred and the secular. Spirituality ought to be expressed in practical terms. This, probably, led him to draw from the Christian scriptural quotes to illustrate his ideals, particularly, his concept of the political kingdom as against the kingdom of God.

⁷¹ See Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, p. 1.

⁷² *Ibid.* See also some details in Roger S. Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, pp. 134 – 136. In fact Gocking further relates that the 'soldiers and police who staged the coup defended their actions on the grounds that Nkrumah's autocratic use of power had led to the abuse of individual rights and liberty, he had ruled in a capricious manner, the rule of law had been violated to the advantage of favorites, and he had been running the country "as his own personal property.'" See p. 147.

POST INDEPENDENCE: THE CONTEMPORARY GHANA

After several coups, Ghana since Rawlings' time, has resorted to democratic governance and have made progress in that respect. Through a duly electoral process, Jerry John Rawlings (1979 – 2000) was succeeded by John Agyekum Kufuor (2000 – 2008) who also handed over the presidential mantle to the Late Prof. John Evans Atta Mills (2009 – 2012). The latter really brought Christianity to the political arena; to the point where he was virtually surrounded by leaders of churches, particularly, the neo-Pentecostals.

Even though many sing the praise of Ghana as being the gateway to Africa and also a developing economy, the situation practically has not been all that better since the independence from the colonial rule. After fifty years of independence, Ghanaians cannot realistically boast of a booming economy. The country is still saddled with the challenge of poverty and political corruption in the form embezzlements of public funds, favoritism and nepotism. In economic terms, Paul Gifford relates the situation in the following words:

The personalized regime meant that although Ghana was fairly stable in West African terms, the economic gains were much smaller and more faltering than was often suggested. The statistics speak for themselves – and these are statistics which are continually rehearsed by Ghanaians. At independence in 1957 Ghana was in the same economic league as Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea; all had a *per capita* income of about \$400. By 2000 Hong Kong's was about \$28,000, Singapore's \$32,000, South Korea's \$18,000 and Malaysia's \$22,000, while Ghana's has decreased from \$400 to between \$360 and \$390.⁷³

The above is a reflection of the current deplorable state of the economy of Ghana. However, there has been improvement in infrastructural developments as well as educational sector particularly with influx of private institutions. Further, Ghana is known worldwide to be among the most peaceful nations of Africa and also endowed with developmental prospects. The next discussion takes us to the sociological description of the church which evokes the current religious context of the study.

⁷³ See Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, p.11.

SOCIOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION THE CHURCH IN GHANA

The predominant religion of pre-colonial Ghana, Gold Coast, was traditional religion with faint presence of Islamic invaders. However, since the colonial era, the situation has vastly changed with a high presence of Christianity. This section offers some statistical analysis of religion for the past decade and a description of strands of churches in Ghana today.

Statistical Situation of Christianity / Religion in Ghana

The 1992 constitution of Ghana ensures the freedom of religion and the practice of it by all persons.⁷⁴ This makes Ghana a secular and religious pluralistic state. As result, the *2009 Report on International Religious Freedom* by the United States Department, asserts that,

Government employees, including the President, are required to swear an oath upon taking office. The oath can be either religious or secular, depending on the preference of the individual. The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas. There is no government body that regulates or oversees religious affairs, as all religious bodies are independent institutions; however, religious institutions must register with the Registrar General's Department to receive formal government recognition. The registration requirement for religious bodies at the Office of the Registrar General is the same for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There were no reports that the Government denied registration to any group. Most indigenous religious groups, with the exception of the Afrikania Mission, did not register. The Government does not provide financial support for any religious organization. Formally registered religions are exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities that do not generate income; however, religious organizations are required to pay progressive taxes, on a pay-as-you-earn basis, on business activities that generate income.⁷⁵

This shows us how the government and the people of Ghana promote, to a large extent, religious pluralism and tolerance. However, the national population statistics of Ghana shows that the majority of the people profess the Christian faith one way or the other. Observe the following tables portraying the percentages of religious affiliations of both the 2000 and 2010 Population Census:

⁷⁴ *The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana* (1992), Article 21 (1)(c).

⁷⁵ United States Department of State, *2009 Report on International Religious Freedom - Ghana*, 26 October 2009, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ae8613dc.html> [accessed 23 October 2012].

Table 1 – 2000 Population Census of Ghana by Religious Affiliation⁷⁶

Religious Affiliation	Percentage
Catholic	15.1
Protestant	18.6
Pentecostal / Charismatic	24.1
Other Christians	11
Islam	15.9
Traditionalist	8.5
Other	0.7
No Religion	6.1

⁷⁶ The figures were taken from MONGABAY.COM, 'Ghana – Social Welfare': http://www.mongabay.com/history/ghana/ghana-social_welfare.html (Accessed on October 24, 2012). Also, see Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (The Netherlands: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2006), p. 35. The figures in the two sources have minimal differences.

The following table shows the 2010 population census of Ghana by religious affiliation:

Table 2: 2010 Population Census of Ghana by Religious Affiliation⁷⁷

Religious Affiliation	Percentages
Catholic	13.1
Protestant	18.4
Pentecostal / Charismatic	28.3
Other Christians	11.4
Islam	17.6
Traditionalist	5.2
Other	0.8
No Religion	5.3

The above table 1 shows that out of the total population of Ghana in 2000, Christianity proved to be the dominant religious group. The Pentecostal / Charismatic adherents which include both the classical and the new Pentecostals are the fastest growing denomination in Ghana. The latter includes both the classical and the new Pentecostals. Other Christians refer to those who do not belong to Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations – an example is the African Independent Churches or the Spiritual Churches.

Comparing tables 1 and 2, it is worth noting that the group we encounter in this study – both the classical and new Pentecostals – has the highest growth rate (15%) and is also the fastest proliferating denomination (compare 2000 – 24.1% with 2010 – 28.3%). The figures do not account for the extent to which Pentecostal phenomenon has and is affecting the mainline

⁷⁷ See Ghana Statistical Service, '2010 Population & Housing Census: Summary Report of Final Results', May 2012, **Table 16: Population by sex, religious affiliation and region**

churches (Catholic and Protestant) with their renewal fiber.⁷⁸ In order to comprehend clearly what is happening in relation to the situation of the church in Ghana, let me offer some descriptions in a form of typology.

Typology of the Church in Ghana

For the sake of this study, I have grouped the churches in Ghana under four main types, namely, the Mainline Churches, the African Independent Churches, the Classical Pentecostal Churches, and the Charismatic Churches. This typology enables us to get a brief understanding of the situation of the church in Ghana even though some may want an expanded version of it.

The Mainline Churches

The term *mainline churches* is commonly used to include denominations like the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Methodist Church Ghana, the Anglican Church, and the like. They are particularly the churches that emerged out of various missionary outreaches in Ghana during the colonial era, thus, some prefer to use the terms *mission churches* or *historic churches*.⁷⁹ These churches represent the traditional or old Christianity in Ghana by contrast with the new ones I have engaged in this study. Their theology, especially the protestant ones, still serves as the basic theological foundation and training in most theological institutions in the country today.

⁷⁸ Cephas N. Omenyo's book brings to light some of the influences of pentecostalism and charismatism in the mainline churches, particularly, in Ghana: *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (2006).

⁷⁹ In his book, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, Omenyo describes the various, about ten, missionary groups whose work led in the then Gold Coast led to some of the denominational churches indicated above. The groups include the Roman Catholic Mission societies (who established the Roman Catholic Church), the Moravian United Brethren Mission, the Netherlands Reformed Mission, the Church of England's Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (The Anglican Church), the Basel Evangelical Mission Society (The Presbyterian Church of Ghana), the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (The Methodist Church, Ghana), the North German Missionary Society (the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana), and the United Free Church of Scotland. See Cephas N. Omenyo, pp. 45 – 61.

The significance of some of the mainline churches in Ghana cannot be underestimated. To this, Paul Gifford has noted that,

The mainline churches have been of considerable significance in building the modern nation, particularly through their schools, to an extent probably unequalled in Africa. The schools – Mfantsipim, Adisadel, St. Augustine's, Prempeh, with the government-founded but very Christian Achimota (for historical reasons nearly all in Cape Coast rather than Accra – have created Ghana's élite since the nineteenth century.⁸⁰

Apart from their impact on education at the lower cycles, the mainline churches have recently founded their private tertiary institutions, in most cases, as response to the fallen moral standards in government-founded ones, normally referred to *secular institutions*. As a colonial legacy, most of the public schools were established so as to enable them to impact or to teach Christian values as well as European civilization. After the independence from colonial rule, Nkrumah changed the curriculum of the schools and included in the syllabi African traditional religion and values. The mainline churches, since the change, felt their basic agenda for education had been altered and so sought restore it. To ensure the continuation of the teaching of Christian ethical values in the rising generation, these so-called Christian private universities have emerged to do that and also to fight the moral degradation or corruption in the country. For instance the mission statement of the Methodist University reads as follows: 'To impart knowledge and skills in disciplines relevant to national development within the context of general global development, and at the same time an all-round development of the student mentally, physically and spiritually on the basis of Christian principles.'⁸¹

Furthermore, the Presbyterian university College Ghana see themselves as "an institution that blends and instills academic and professional excellence with an appreciation of cultural, technological, environment and globalisation trends in the men and women who pass through it and whose lives *reflect Christian principles and values, including love and compassion, discipline, honesty, selflessness and humility*".⁸² Thus, the mainline churches' theological and ethical or moral persuasions are seen as the bedrock of Christianity in Ghana.

⁸⁰ See Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, p. 20.

⁸¹ This is taken from the Webpage of the Methodist University College Ghana: http://www.mucg.edu.gh/aboutus/mission_vision.html - (Accessed on 26 October 2012). Emphasis is mine.

⁸² See the Presbyterian University College Ghana Website: <http://www.presbyuniversity.edu.gh/?q=node/5> - (Accessed on 26 October 2012). Emphasis is mine.

African Indigenous Churches (AICs)

The African Indigenous Churches⁸³, or what other scholars like Baeta refers to as the Spiritual Churches⁸⁴, are a group of denominational churches solely initiated by indigenous Africans who were converted from the traditional religion into Christianity through the ministry of one Prophet William Wade Harris (1860 – 1929)⁸⁵. They emerged during the colonial as well as the European missionary era to respond to first to an outbreak of influenza epidemic after the First World War⁸⁶ and also to the then fast-growing anti-witchcraft cults in the country, especially, when the missionaries could not handle it. Omenyo relates that these churches exorcise evil spirits and cure individuals who confess to having been possessed by witchcraft.⁸⁷ In another article, Omenyo has argued that it was the AICs prophets who closed ‘the gap that used to exist between the primal / traditional spirituality and Christianity in Africa by assuming the vital functions of the traditional priest in Christian mode.’⁸⁸ This type of churches, though unpopular now, is best described as those who first contextualized or indigenized Christianity in Africa by mixing it with the African traditional religious beliefs and practices – a mixture of Christianity and African traditional religion.

The Independent Indigenous Churches are characterized with the use of paraphernalia (such as candles, incense, *florida* or perfumed water, scented powders and the like) in their ritual worship. They are said to have sacred places (like grooves and sanctuaries) where footwear is forbidden as well as menstruating women. They also have special dress like red or white long dress (or gown)

⁸³ This is a borrowed term from the book title of Ayegboyin & Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspectives* (Nigeria: Greater Heights Publications, 1997). The book actually describes this group of churches in Nigeria who have similar characteristics as those in Ghana of which Christian G. Baeta, professor of the study of religions, studied.

⁸⁴ See Christian G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A case study of some Spiritual Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1962). This book describes the African Indigenous Churches in Ghana.

⁸⁵ William Wade Harris was a prophet who hailed from Liberia and who believed the Angel of God had visited him in a vision and anointed him as a prophet to turn people from their indigenous traditional religious faith into Christianity. This he did by converting thousands into Christianity during the colonial and missionary era. For detail information on him, see David Stiles-Ocran, ‘Prophetism in Ghana: A Case Study of some Charismatic Churches’, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis Submitted to the Department for the Study of Religions, the University of Ghana, Legon, 2004, pp. 32 – 38. See also E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: Blessed Publications, 2001), p. 59; and Deji Ayegboyin & S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches*, pp. 49 – 52, and Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, p. 67.

⁸⁶ See Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, *The Rise of the Charismatic Movement in the mainlines Churches in Ghana* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1993), p. 17.

⁸⁷ See Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, p. 74.

⁸⁸ See Cephas N. Omenyo, ‘Man of God Prophecy Unto Me’, p. 35.

which is unisex. They endorse polygamous marriage and the leaders are predominantly women. They are, actually, the originators of prayer camps in Ghana where people with so-called spiritual diseases go for exorcism and healing. One of the ways they conduct their healing and deliverance is by ritual cleansing with water mixed with some herbs and specially prepared lavenders. For instance, Mullings, who took time studying the Church of the Messiah in Labadi, Accra the capital city of Ghana, describes their healing process as follows:

Treatments were more or less the same for all illnesses. Patients were told to purchase candles and incense to burn, and sacred oil and water to be applied to the body. They were given prayers and psalms, the repetition of which was to increase their faith, and they were encouraged to request prayers from the praying band whenever necessary... Daily treatments, then, consisted of activities designed to strengthen the individual – prayers, psalms, lighting of candles, and bathing in holy water.⁸⁹

I grew up in a town where the Spiritual Churches were very popular in terms of spiritual healing and even witnessed how my mother, who suffered a chronic illness, and my brother who also had stomach illness, were cured specifically in the Church of the Twelve Apostles. These churches are still present in Ghana but are not as popular as they used to be. Some even think, probably that, some of these churches have re-emerged within the neo-Pentecostal denominations. Writing from a South African context of prophet/healer in the AICs, Oosthuizen remarks that

The prophet/healer can meet this world of insecurity, often of misfortune and look into the future in order to be better prepared for what is approaching. The prophets take seriously the worldview in which their people live. The emphasis is never on “pie in the sky when you die”, the emphasis is on what is needed in here and now. Theologically, there are issues which need close scrutiny but from a socio-psychological point of view, the prophet’s position is firmly established in many AICs and is tremendous source of scrutiny to many.⁹⁰

The interesting thing to note about the AICs is that, as we shall realize in the ensuing typology, they share some common features with most neo-Pentecostal denominations, especially those which are led by so-called prophets. However, as compared to the Mainline Churches, the Classical Pentecostal Churches, and some of the neo-Pentecostal Churches, the AICs have no

⁸⁹ See Leith Mullings, *Therapy, Ideology, and Social Change: Mental Healing in Urban Ghana* (London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 139 – 140.

⁹⁰ See Gerhardin C. Oosthuizen, *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), p. 193. Also cited by David Stiles-Ocran, “Prophetism in Ghana”, p. 14, and Cephas N. Omenyo, ‘Man of God Prophecy Unto Men’, p. 36.

international networks and branches established in other countries, although they have some clients who come from different parts of the world for consultation, healing and deliverance. They are extremely indigenous and independent; hence some prefer to designate them as African Independent Churches.

The Classical Pentecostal Churches (CPCs)

I do not intend to do a detailed argument with respect to the several debates about who is a Pentecostal and who is not⁹¹, but for the purpose of the distinction between CPCs and AICs, a Pentecostal is one who believe that the biblical pattern of baptism in the Holy Spirit is ‘an experience subsequent to salvation and evidenced by the ability to speak in tongues and manifest the other gifts of the Holy Spirit described in 1 Corinthians 12.’⁹² Thus, whereas the AICs are noted for their emphasis on the use of paraphernalia described earlier and their stress on angelic visitation in worship, the CPCs strongly emphasize the use of the Bible and the belief in baptism of Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues.⁹³ The CPCs actually came up strongly against the AICs, accusing them of practicing religious syncretism and of being infested with demonic or evil spirits.

I remember very well that earlier and even today, once a classical Pentecostal believer meets you and inquires about which church one belong to, or you mention an AIC, you shall be forced to renounce that church and when you surrender, you will be exorcized as soon as possible. As a matter of fact, all the Pentecostal traditions (that is, both classical and new) condemn the AICs and do not accept their adherents into fellowship without letting them recant their beliefs. David Martin’s distinction between the AICs and the CPCs also fits the situation in Ghana:

Whereas the Independent churches pursued Africanization ... and the historic churches, at least at leadership level, combined a critical political perspective with inculturation and cultural retrieval, the

⁹¹ African scholars like Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, pp. 10 - 13, Cephas N. Omenyo and Abamfo O. Atiemo have dealt with this subject in detail.

⁹² See Jones Darkwa Amanor, ‘Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African Reformation’, *Cyberjournal For Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*: www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj13/amanor.pdf - Accessed on 28 October 2012.

⁹³ However, some scholars like Asamoah-Gyadu and others see the AICs as the earlier wave of Pentecostalism in Ghana. See Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, p. 19. See also Jones Darkwa Amanor, ‘Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African Reformation’.

Pentecostal cared for none of these things in their intense desire to repudiate whatever they saw as holding them back and embedding them in local practices that inhibited their mobility, freedom, and advancement... As for the political world, it was far above them and initially a realm dominated by “the principalities and powers”...⁹⁴

Thus, classical Pentecostals, at their initial stages withdrew from politics as a *world* gimmick and condemned the AICs for altering the Christian scriptures through inculturation.

Mr. Peter Anim, between the periods of 1917 and 1923, founded the first indigenous classical Pentecostal church in Ghana called Faith Tabernacle Church which was later known as the Christ Apostolic Church.⁹⁵ And today, there are four CPCs in Ghana, namely, the Christ Apostolic Church, the Church of Pentecost, the Apostolic Church of Ghana, and the Assemblies of God. There also other denominations that have allied themselves with the CPCs for the purpose of fellowship and association under the name the Ghana Pentecostal Council (GPC).

Notwithstanding their independent nature, the CPCs in Ghana have several international networks. The Assemblies of God (AG), for instance, being originally a Pentecostal missionary church from the USA, ‘depended very heavily on financial and other assistance from America.’⁹⁶ Today, even though, the AG is independent from their foreign mother-churches, individual congregations network with other foreign counterparts as well as other Christian organizations outside the country. The Church of Pentecost (CoP) has branches almost all over the world with the international headquarters based in Accra, Ghana. From Ghana, the CoP trains and sends missionaries to head and pastor all the established branches in other nations and continents.

The CPCs’ long standing distinctive feature was the strict adherence to *holiness* and anti-materialism. Their main doctrinal emphasis centered on the need to gain entrance into the kingdom of God through salvation and observing a sinless lifestyle. Contrasting the CPCs with the neo-Pentecostals, Jane E. Soothill relates that ‘where Pentecostalism in its classical form was characterized by a retreat from the world an anti-material or “holiness” stance, the new charismatic churches are most definitely of “this world” and express frequent concern for the

⁹⁴ See David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 133.

⁹⁵ See Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, p. 94. See also Jones Darkwa Amanor, ‘Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African Reformation’.

⁹⁶ See Jones Darkwa Amanor, ‘Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African Reformation’, p. 25.

health, wealth and general success of adherents in this life time.⁹⁷ Classical Pentecostalism actually promised their adherents *a pie in the sky*. The story today, as we will see in the ensuing chapters, appears a bit different and the distinction between classical and neo-Pentecostalism almost irrelevant.

The Neo-Pentecostal Churches (NPCs)

I have used the term *neo-Pentecostal* to embrace the various new denominational churches who do not fall under the CPCs by virtue of their newness with respect to the time of their emergence, and the emphasis placed on the importance of the leadership. The NPCs, which started with the Charismatic Churches, emerged on the Ghanaian scene in the 1980s and since then Ghana has witnessed several phases of them. Today, we can categorize this group of churches into two, the Mainline Charismatic Churches (MCC) and the Prophetic Charismatic Churches (PCCs). The MCCs represents the older ones who are typically led by *Bishops* and *Archbishops*, whereas the PCCs are characterized by their prophetic ministry and predominantly led by *prophets*. Again, I have chosen to describe these churches under one group – neo-Pentecostals – in this study because the difference between them, when carefully examined, boils down to the level or degree of *formal* education. Whereas, the academic qualification of most of the leaders of the MCCs is at least a Bachelors degree, the PCCs' prophets are mostly without any tertiary educational qualification.

In addition, whereas the MCCs mostly conduct their worship services with the English language as the main medium of communication and so usually attract the educated and the middle class in the society, the PCCs are noted for their reliance on the local dialect or language and attracts those with less or no formal educational background as well as the marginalized. As a result, one is tempted to say that the PCCs are, probably, the resurfacing of the AICs in the contemporary Ghana since they to share some resemblance, particularly, in terms of practices.⁹⁸ Thus, instead of charismatic churches, *neo-Pentecostal* is preferred to include all new form of Pentecostalism

⁹⁷ See Jane E. Soothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 37.

⁹⁸ The AICs, as noted earlier in the work, were the originators of prayer camps in the country. Today, the PCCs are also characterized with prayer camps and deliverance or healing centers.

or charismatism. Most of these churches also belong to an association known as the National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches (NACCC).⁹⁹

The NPCs are also characterized by their international networks. Whereas some of these churches have their denominational branches established in other nations of the world, others have supporting or sponsoring churches or Christian organizations, mainly, in Europe and USA. As a result, most of them have the opportunity to travel abroad for international conferences and for more network building. This makes this group of churches more ecumenical in their operations.

The NPCs, the focus of the study, represent Ghana's new Christianity in several ways – political, socio-economic developments, and reliance on the media as the means for propaganda. Omenyo has described the extent to which prophets of the prophetic charismatic churches have gained prominence. He relates that 'the prophets from the neo-prophetic churches are the ones who are presumed to be consulted by public figures.'¹⁰⁰ The NPCs are also noted for their frequent National Prayer Campaigns which bring all Christian believers together to pray for the nation and which usually are attended by some political leaders, and sometimes, the head of state.

The theology of the NPCs, which is probably a source of influence to almost all the various types of churches described above, is based on *experience* of the supernatural which is evidenced through the well-being of the Christian believer. This Christianity, as discussed in the following chapters, promises the adherents here and now freedom or liberty and the focus is mainly on the leadership, that is, their ability to divine in order to provide the needs of the congregants.

Furthermore, the social relations that exist within the NPCs (especially between the leaders and the adherents) can be described as the Patron-Client relations. And according to Eisenstadt and Roniger, patron-client relations involve:

peculiar combination of inequality and asymmetry in power with seeming mutual solidarity expressed in terms of personal identity and interpersonal sentiments and obligations; second, a combination of potential coercion and exploitation with voluntary relations and mutual obligations; third, a combination of emphasis

⁹⁹ See Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁰ See Cephas N. Omenyo, 'Man of God Prophecy Unto Me', p. 44. Omenyo, in the same article, further notes various visits of African heads of states to one Prophet T. B. Joshua, a popular Nigerian preacher, including the immediate past president of Ghana, the Late President John Evans Atta Mills.

on such mutual obligations and solidarity or reciprocity between patrons and clients with somewhat illegal or semi-legal aspect of these relations.¹⁰¹

The leaders of these churches are materially wealthy due their dominant prosperity teachings. They are therefore seen separated from their followers who sometimes look up to them for help, and such aids are returned with some kind of favor or the other. We shall see detailed discussions on social relations of the NPC in the ensuing chapters, particularly, chapter six.

The churches or pastors I interviewed and studied for this thesis represent of the neo-Pentecostal churches by all standards, and the discussion in the ensuing chapters is applicable to Ghana as a whole and, in many respects, to mostly West Africa. Some of the pastors are the District or Regional leaders of bigger umbrella denominations in Ghana and beyond.

CONFIGURING THE CONNECTIONS

Nkrumah's perception of the Mainline Churches as agents of colonialism led to his antagonistic nationalist attitude towards the church. He then, with some ideas from the Christian beliefs about Jesus as the Messiah of the kingdom of God, urged the populace to prioritize their desires by focusing first on their freedom from colonial rule, this he called *the political kingdom*. He thought that such freedom was crucial and meaningful for one's total well-being both in religious and political life. Due to this ideology, the followers began to hail him as the Messiah of Ghana and Africa as a continent. The emphasis on the need for the people of Gold Coast to seek first the political kingdom was construed by the church as contrary to the tenets of the Christian faith. The mainline churches' leadership felt the ball of politics had totally turned against them and God. They were no more going to enjoy the political privileges they had during the colonial regime. They, as a result, drew a line between the sacred (religion, particularly, Christianity) and the secular (politics). Thus, the mainline churches began to rein negative accusations and responses against the government and became extremely critical to politics. As a result, Addo admonishes that:

¹⁰¹ See S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal relations and the structure of trust in society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 43.

For the mainline Christian churches to recapture any socio-cultural relevance, they may have to abandon their “guardian mentality” which makes a distinction between the sacred and secular realms, and actively engage in criticism of the government in power, projecting and defending universal values in their own ethics. To overlook the creative tension between the universality of Christ and the particularity of believers will cost the church its political and social legitimacy in Ghana.¹⁰²

The above admonition is the position of the African Independent Churches, a position contrary to that of the mainline churches. The emergence of the AICs were seen as ‘the African’s protest against white domination in power and culture over the church’ resulting in breakaways in the church.¹⁰³ Their agitations fell in line with that of Nkrumah’s call for total freedom from the colonial rule. According to Addo, the emergence of the AICs offers one of the reasons for a new relationship between church and state in Ghana.¹⁰⁴ He further states:

The rise of independent African churches with a theology that maintained that there is no such thing as disembodied soul, that one could be African and Christian at the same time, and that Western Christian forms should not be the norm, gave support and encouragement to Nkrumah’s neo-traditionalism.¹⁰⁵

The classical Pentecostals maintained the position of the mainline churches and saw any politician who meddled with affairs of the church as an enemy. They condemned Christians who aspired to be politicians and would want political leaders to advice Christians on matters of spirituality. They maintained an abstract view of the kingdom of God – spiritual – and that even though it is present; its presence is to be observed with reverence and acknowledgement of the fear of God in one’s life. How do the classical Pentecostals see the adherents of the kingdom of God? Apostle Michael Ntumy, the former chairman of the Church of Pentecost, gives a response in his book:

Those who believe and accept His invitation into the Kingdom become His people. These unique people abide by the laws of the Kingdom by living lives worthy of the Kingdom; get involved in the business of the Kingdom and should seek the power of the Kingdom. This power, given through the Holy Spirit, makes the people of the Kingdom invincible in their conflict with demonic forces, strengthens them in their inner

¹⁰² See Ebenezer Obiri Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana*, p. 193.

¹⁰³ See Jones Darkwa Amanor, ‘Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African Reformation’.

¹⁰⁴ See Ebenezer Obiri Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana*, pp. 191 – 192.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 193.

being, equips them for the service of the Kingdom and empowers them to demonstrate the presence of the Kingdom through the healings, exorcisms, diverse miracles, wonders and signs, which *follow* them.¹⁰⁶

Thus, for the classical Pentecostals, the kingdom of God has nothing to do with politics which, in their view, is profane and worldly. The neo-Pentecostals, however, have a contrary view. They see no distinction between politics and religion, secular and sacred, a view Nkrumah upheld and sought to practice. As I have discussed, the latter see their religion as offering them the platform rather to enable influence decisions made by politicians. Whereas the mainline churches and the classical Pentecostals maintained a distance from the politicians, the neo-Pentecostals sought and seeks to get involved in politics and encourage the political leaders. The latter, contrary to position of the mainline churches, never hesitate to respond to the call of politicians to assist in any assignment. For instance, in his doctoral dissertation, Karen Lauterbach writes: ‘It was the neo-Pentecostal churches that later contributed to the legitimization of Rawlings’ political power. After Rawlings was elected president in 1992 he asked the Christian churches to organize a thanksgiving service. The mainline churches refused, but Pentecostals agreed and prayed for Rawlings.’¹⁰⁷ The following chapters present the views of both the classical and neo-Pentecostals about praxis of the kingdom of God today.

¹⁰⁶ See Michael Kwabena Ntuny, *The Eternal Kingdom of God* (Accra: Advocate Publishing Limited, 2005), p. 72.

¹⁰⁷ See Karen Lauterbach, “The Craft of Pastorship in Ghana and Beyond”, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Graduate School of International Development Studies, Department of Society and Globalization: <http://dspace.ruc.dk/bitstream/1800/3975/KarenLauterbachPhD.thesis.pdf> – (Assessed on 04 October 2012), p. 70.

Chapter 3

THE MISSION OF JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

The chapter presents some of the controversial teachings and practices of both the classical and neo-Pentecostal churches which, to some extent, misrepresent Jesus' message of the kingdom of God. The misrepresentations include the extreme emphasis on Jesus' kingdom of God as entirely spiritual phenomenon by the classical Pentecostals, and the prosperity or wealth gospel of the neo-Pentecostal churches which has led to materialism and the creation of patron-client relations in the church leading to negative reactions from the public against the church.¹⁰⁸ And, it is primarily the discussion of an aspect of the fieldwork, particularly, the respondents' (from both classical Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches) views on the meaning and the importance of the kingdom of God and the mission of Jesus in the church today. The discourse is presented by looking at the various positions of the subject matter: What is the kingdom of God? When is the kingdom of God? And how is the kingdom? The "what" looks at the various perceptions of the kingdom of God; the "when" is about the kingdom of being present or future event; and the "how" is the question of entry requirements into the kingdom of God. I have also separately discussed the various positions on the mission of Jesus, and gender and the kingdom of God.

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE MISSION OF JESUS

The mission of Jesus Christ is understood as the primary purpose of the church today on earth.¹⁰⁹ A central text to express the mission of Jesus in the Gospel is Luke 4: 18 – 19. I intend to discuss these responses briefly. Primarily, Luke 4: 18 -19 is perceived among the Pentecostals as the caption of Jesus' earthly mission or purpose: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to

¹⁰⁸ See the introductory chapter for concerns and articles in Ghanaian popular media publications. Some have called the prophets or the leaders of these neo-Pentecostal churches as *demigods*, charlatans, imposters and the like.

¹⁰⁹ I had an interview with Rev. Samuel Kwame Anning of Centre for New Life Ministries, Koforidua on July 23, 2012 at the church office. Also Rev.

proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”¹¹⁰ Some perceive the mission of Jesus as a mission of Love and not vengeance.¹¹¹ They argue that when Jesus read the Scriptures from the Prophet Isaiah (61: 1 – 2a), he was intentionally emphasizing the aspects of the Scripture that promotes God’s love (which is spelt out in John 3: 16) as the ultimate purpose of his coming and not the vengeance aspect of that prophecy (Isaiah 61: 2b).¹¹²

Furthermore, according to the classical and neo-Pentecostals, the above text pinpoints to the fact that the main mission of Jesus on earth was to preach the gospel to the poor. The gospel or the good news is the riches that come to the poor person. The poor are generally defined as people who have not yet received the gospel of the kingdom or professed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior; such people are seen as not having or being part of the kingdom of God. Of course, the poor can also refer to those who are economically handicapped or challenged. However, speaking about the poor, they are perceived more in spiritual terms – those who thirst and hunger for the righteousness of God. Categorizing the poor into two, one respondent puts narrated as follows:

The first are those who are poor in spirit: These are people who are not depending on any other thing but are depending on the Lord. It is like if the Lord does not help me, there is nobody who can help me. Therefore, they are ready to accept the truth of God. So status wise, physically or materially, they may not be poor financially, but they are poor in spirit – they are hungry for God. So they are ready to take whatever God says. The second are those who are materially and financially poor: In such cases, it means that the child of God must be able to help because, in Deuteronomy 15: 10 – 11, God admonishes Israel that they should not forget the poor and he says that it is for this reason that he blessed them. So the poor will always be there. We, who have been blessed by God, must be able to do something to help the poor. And the church as institution must exhort her members to help those who are in need. But, the other side of it too must be addressed, in that, even

¹¹⁰ This is the New King James Version of the Luke 4: 18 – 19.

¹¹¹ This is a response from an interview with Rev. George Sunnu of Grace Outreach Church, Koforidua: July 28, 2012.

¹¹² *Ibid*

though the God says that the poor will always be there, I do not believe that God expects one person to remain in poverty forever.¹¹³

Jesus' mission also included the demonstration of the power in the healing ministry – he healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, cast out demons from those under demonic possession, and also raised the dead to life. His mission was to establish the kingdom of God on earth – “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”¹¹⁴ This verse is understood as that which spells out the need for the praxis of the kingdom of God – the church's pursuit of Jesus' mission on earth.

VARIOUS PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS

Generally, both Pentecostal persuasions uphold the view that the kingdom of God is simply the domain where the rule of God prevails and is observed by the subjects or the children of the kingdom. Apostle Michael Kwabena Ntumi sees the kingdom of God as the rule or reign of God in His divine power and order on earth, and in heaven.¹¹⁵ Anyone who believes in and professes Jesus Christ as Lord and personal savior is primarily enlisted as a candidate and subject of this kingdom; such a person is believed to have been translated from the kingdom of darkness (Satan) into the kingdom of God. Thus, the Kingdom of God is mostly perceived among most pastors as the rule or domain of God; a place where God reigns; when God has absolute right to rule where He has the right to.

The Kingdom of God is Present and Future

Regarding the timing, the classical and the neo-Pentecostals hold the view that Jesus' kingdom of God is both present and future, of course, with some thin line difference in its praxis. The kingdom of God is present in the demonstration of the believers' commitment to the various practices and activities of the church. Luke 17: 20 – 21 indicates that “... The kingdom of God

¹¹³ Rev. Dickson Tuffuor Sarpong is the Eastern Regional Pastor of the International Central Gospel Church, and a leader over five hundred member-congregation.

¹¹⁴ Quote from the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6: 10 (New King James Version)

¹¹⁵ See Michael Kwabena Ntumi, *The Eternal Kingdom of God*, p. 26.

does not come you're your careful observation ... because the kingdom of God is within you." This interpreted to mean that the kingdom of God is demonstrated by the release of divine power in the Christian believer. Paul, the Apostle, is said have shared light on this in 1 Corinthians 4: 20 that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." Also, in Roman 14: 17, Paul says "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Ntuny explains that 'the demonstration of this power is seen in the area of destroying the works of Satan – healing and exorcism', adding that Jesus said "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come to you" (Matthew 12: 28).¹¹⁶ He further explains that

By implication therefore, whenever the rule or power of God is demonstrated through the power of transformed lives or through the demolition of Satanic power, the Kingdom of God is being displayed. Anyone who believes in Jesus Christ therefore ENTERS into this tremendous spiritual arena of power. We do experience this in the here-and-now!¹¹⁷

This is the basis of the Pentecostals' emphasis on the need to demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit in the form of spiritual healing and deliverance; Jesus drove out demons by the virtue of the presence of the kingdom of God, so the church today ought to do the same to continue the works of the Master.

The notion of the kingdom of God being present is further interpreted by neo-Pentecostals to include not only the spiritual but also the political and the socio-economic life of the people. They maintain, for instance, that when Jesus said the Kingdom of God is at hand, he was talking about the fact that in this era God has the right to rule over the rights of men and any area where he is given the right to. Also, in the realm of the Kingdom of God, he exercises power and authority over the hearts of people who submit to him. One of my respondents sums it up in the following words:

The kingdom of God, as I understand it, is not a geographical location but the reign or rule of God over the redeemed, more so because he shares his reign with them. In essence, the kingdom of God is the redeemed of God, who by reason of their redemption are made kings and priests of God (Rev. 1: 6; 5: 10).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 27.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*.

As kings, we are to take or control territories for God because a king must have a domain or territory that he rules or controls. As we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to take territories for God, we are in effect working towards the fulfillment of Revelations 11: 15b which says: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.”

As priests, we have the responsibility of ensuring the spiritual well being of the redeemed of God (not forgetting the social aspect) so they can grow into the fullness of the stature of Christ, thereby showing forth the praise of him who has called us out of the kingdom of darkness into his marvelous light (Eph. 4: 13; 1 Pet. 2: 9).¹¹⁸

The neo-Pentecostals place emphasis on the reality of the kingdom of God in terms of its praxis – the physical manifestation of the power of God in the Christian believer. To them, much as the Kingdom of God seen as futuristic, it is also more or less the rule of God within the Christian believer. This means that it takes the child of God to demonstrate the rule of God; God does not physically come to sit to control us, rather when we submit to his rule spiritually, we then become his representatives – we are ambassadors of Christ. When I asked about the praxis of the Kingdom of God in church today, another respondent relates:

The Church of Jesus Christ is supposed to be the expression of the Kingdom of God. How would you see that God is ruling in a place? It’s when the right gospel of accepting Jesus as Lord is preached and men have accepted him as their Lord that is the church. So for me church is so important because she is the sole expression of the Kingdom of God – whatever we do we must express the sole rulership of God in our lives. So, this makes the church so important because without us no one can say that the Kingdom of God is ruling. The fact that all pastors are progressing in ministry and in life means that the Kingdom of God is ruling.

Whenever, for instance, we hear of Nigeria, where people are being killed and churches are closed down, it is a matter of the Kingdom of God which is being affected and not an

¹¹⁸ An interview with Rev. George Sunnu, the resident pastor of Grace Outreach Church, Koforidua Branch, Koforidua-Ghana, at his home on July 28, 2012.

individual. Also, the more the gospel is preached and churches are established, the more the Kingdom of God is realized in places.¹¹⁹

Another respondent relates that, as God's representatives, Christians are expected to manifest his divine power to rule over every aspect of the human life – spiritual, physical, socio-economic and political – and the Bible is the basic tool for this task. The Bible has become the basis for the principles or rules of the kingdom of God.¹²⁰

In this sense, materialism is not so much considered to be worldly and therefore negative, as the classical Pentecostals perceives it to be. The material prosperity of the Christian is considered as evidence of true manifestation of the kingdom of God in one's life.¹²¹ Here, poverty is seen as a curse and a product of demonic hold in one's life, hence the need for deliverance or exorcism. Let me illustrate the point here with a popular wave of teachings. With respect to material prosperity, there is a strong belief that the heavenly streets are made of gold and so if one has never seen and used gold in their life time in this world, she/he is shall collapse of the surprise of seeing gold for the first time. This is said to emphasize the importance of wealth acquisition as children of the kingdom of God. They will refer you that remember the Lord Jesus Christ that he was rich but because of us he became poor so that through his poverty we will be rich. So Jesus made an exchange, he took our poverty and gave us his riches. This is the prosperity gospel.¹²²

Thus, there is some difference between the classical Pentecostals and the neo-Pentecostals regarding the present nature of the kingdom of God. There is a strong emphasis among the classical Pentecostals on the urgency of the consummation of the kingdom in the future and need for the preparedness of participants. This is revealed in the stress on what is referred to as *Heaven: the City of the kingdom*. Heaven is a place prepared by for those who love him and have also responded to his call to be partakers of the kingdom. Ntummy maintains that heaven is God's house (John 14: 2) where the saints of God will live with Him forever and ever; that it is also

¹¹⁹ An interview with Rev. Dickson Tuffuor Sarpong, the Eastern Regional Pastor of the Central Gospel Church International, Koforidua – Ghana on August 3, 2012 at his Home Office.

¹²⁰ Had an interview with Apostle Richard Adanu, the Eastern Regional Apostle of the Great Commission Church International, Ghana on August 9, 2012 in his home.

¹²¹ I had a follow up interview with Rev. Samuel Kwakwah of Reigning Power Ministries, Koforidua, on the significance of material prosperity in a Christian believer's life on February 6, 2013 at Church office.

¹²² *Ibid.*

called *paradise* (2 Corinthians 12: 4) meaning *the kings' garden*.¹²³ Also, reference is continually made to Revelations 21:9-21 to describe in details how the city of the kingdom looks like; it is a place that members are encouraged to have the strong desire to be there.

Revelation 21: 9 – 21 tells about the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God full of glory and brightness like precious jewels – jasper and crystal. The revelator narrates that the entire city was made of pure gold and decorated with precious stones – jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx and the like. One of my later respondent said, if heaven is full of gold and precious stones – expensive minerals – then there is nothing wrong in having gold today. That, all he is looking forward to is to have just one piece of gold bar and all his poverty shall be over.¹²⁴

In addition, the stress on the ultimate destination of every child of the kingdom is also seen in popular songs in Akan language which is emotionally sang with during time of praises at every funeral:

Jerusalem, ɔman fofor

ɔman no ye asuomdwe man

Debi yebe hyiemu na ye Ewurade atow Halleluyya

The song translates as:

Jerusalem, the new city

That city is a peaceful city

One we shall meet together with to sing Halleluyya.

Another song, also in Akan, goes like this:

Heven, enyimnyam kurow

Heven wɔ ye enyimnyam kurow

Enyigye pi wɔhɔ

Chorus

Ewurade na wahye yen bɔ

Sɛ ye wie yen edwuma no a

¹²³ See Ntuny, *The Eternal Kingdom of God*, p. 67.

¹²⁴ Rev. Samuel Kwakwah of Reigning Power Ministries, Koforidua.

Heven wɔ yɛ enyimnyam kurow
Enyigye pi wɔhɔ

The translation is as follows:

Heaven, a glorious city
Heaven is a glorious city
There is much joy in that place
Chorus
It is God who has promised
That when we finished our labour here on earth
Heaven is a glorious city for us
There is so much joy in that place.

The above songs and many others portray the stress on the urgency of the future kingdom and the adherents' passion to partake of it. To be ready for the future kingdom, the Christian believer is required to pursue three things – kingdom living, kingdom business and kingdom power.¹²⁵ To qualify to enter the kingdom, one is expected live a life worthy of it – a life of holiness, righteousness, and striving to love one another. Also, those who want to partake of the kingdom at its consummation ought to be involved in the work of the ministry on earth – worshipping God, being regular at church services or fellowship, and engaging in the work of evangelization. Ntummy puts it this way:

Any other business is our own business which only fits us for a short while on earth. The business of the kingdom – worshipping God in truth and holiness, sacrificial service, the offering of our resources and the fruit of our lips has eternal rewards. So also is our worship through expressing Christian fellowship and evangelizing – winning souls to the LORD. Get occupied NOW.¹²⁶

Kingdom power has to do with the emphasis placed on the manifestation of the power of the gospel in healings, miracles, and exorcisms. Pentecostals uphold the fact that there are spiritual strongholds and bondages that interfere with the affairs of humans inflicting pains and sufferings

¹²⁵ See Ntummy, *The Eternal Kingdom of God*, pp. 58 – 59.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 59 – 60.

so as to prevent them from living a fulfilled life and to put their faith in God. So the basic function of the church is to diagnose the spiritual cause of the client's predicament and to destroy any demonic trace *in the Name of Jesus*. They believe that there are sicknesses and diseases that are beyond the professional competencies of the medical personnel; such cases are spiritual which can only be handled or dealt with in the church by the power of the gospel. In his book, Ntuny writes: 'The people of the Kingdom are, therefore, not a bunch of helpless folks at the mercy of situations, circumstances or the whims and caprices of physical or metaphysical phenomena. No. They have power – the power of the Holy Spirit.'¹²⁷

Both the classical and the neo-Pentecostals adhere to the link between the present and future kingdoms. In fact one respondent posits that Christians not going to remain on this earth forever, and that the interesting thing is that the present way of life shall determine one's place in eternity.¹²⁸ Therefore, the believer's acts on earth today must have an eternal perspective so as to be found worthy of accountability before God in the future kingdom.¹²⁹

The Kingdom of God and the Prosperity Gospel

The neo-Pentecostals stress that kingdom power is not only to be seen in spiritual terms as described by the classical Pentecostals. That the kingdom power of the church embraces also the socio-economic and the political life of the people; the kingdom of God has the transformative power which brings about a holistic change in whoever embraces it. This is seen in their focus on material prosperity, and their close relationship with political figures of the nation. Two Biblical references define the basis of their quest for material prosperity. The first one is Deuteronomy 8:17, 18: 'then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for *it is* He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day.' The

¹²⁷ See Ntuny, p. 60. The following Biblical references are made to buttress the point: Luke 9:1, 2; 2:24, 49; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:17-20.

¹²⁸ I had an interview with Apostle Richard Adanu of Great Commission Church International, Koforidua.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

second reference is 3 John 2: ‘Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.’¹³⁰

Prosperity, as an indispensable mark of the kingdom life among the neo-Pentecostals, is seen to be in three fold – spiritual, mental (soul), and physical. One of respondents explained these three aspects as follows:

Spiritual Prosperity occurs when you are rich towards God. Your relationship with God is solid, that is, you love God; you pray when no one is around or encourages you to do so; you are a happy person because of your relationship with God. To me, that is the most important thing in life. True happiness is as a result of our relationship with God.

Mental prosperity has to do with having the right attitude towards life; when your thoughts are positive; this is because when anyone entertains negative thoughts, he/she is said to have negative mentality and also such a person is poor – he will mentally produce poverty.

With physical prosperity, there is the need to acknowledge the fact that it is the perfect will of God that man should prosper. If you do not have money, you cannot lots of questions because money answers all things. And we believe in the word of God and prayer but we also believe that man must work with his hands. These hands have been given to us to work and to bless our lives. I thank God for lots of the prayers we make for people but after the prayer, I also ask them to go and work. Giving is a source of prosperity when you give in faith, but how will you give if you do not have? You have to work, you have to invest spiritually, but you have to work. You have work by proving and sharpening yourself, and then know even the business lines – what is going on; what will sell, what will not sell.¹³¹

Thus, for the neo-Pentecostals, the gospel of the kingdom of God cannot be complete in a believer’s life without a tangible evidence of material prosperity. As such, one of the main function of the pastors is to diagnose the client’s to know the spiritual cause of their predicament,

¹³⁰ Both references are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible. The references are the basic point of their belief in prosperity gospel.

¹³¹ An interview with Rev. Dickson Tuffuor Sarpong the Eastern Regional Pastor of the International Central Gospel Church, Koforidua, Ghana on August 3, 2012 at his home office.

take them through deliverance and assure them of well-being in health and in wealth. However, when it comes to the steps towards prosperity, the key emphasis is giving in the form money and property (lands, houses, etc). Also, to improve the financial state of the church as well as individual pastors, some have written and published Christian inspirational books. One respondent narrates:

As a pastor, I teach the people by being an example. I write books which bring money or income; it is not for free; I pay my tithe from it, which is the part I give to God. Whenever I am invited to preach in another church, I also introduce my books and if they like my message, they also buy my books. This helps me physically. I have a house which I built out of the income from the books and furnished as well. No money was given from the church help me build the house. Also, I make money out of the various invitations to preach in other churches. Sometimes, you get so tired that you may want turn down some of the invitations, but if you are hardworking type you will honour them since they bring some income. And because people understand giving and blessing, when you go and bless them with the word, they also bless you with their material things.¹³²

The quest to be free from demonic influences through exorcism and to be financially wealthy, to have total well-being, one ought to be closely associated with the prosperity gospel of the neo-Pentecostal churches. However, this has become a distinguishing factor of the Ghanaian as well as African Christianity in general. The neo-Pentecostals advance the view that the kingdom of God ensures the economic progress of the adherent. In ensuring this, practical measures are taken so as to realize their dream of material prosperity, the example of which is the giving out of small funds in the form of tokens or loans to the poor for micro business. Detailed discussion of how the poor is practically assisted to enhance their economic status is presented in the following chapter.

Despite the criticisms from the outside, the extreme emphasis and focus on prosperity gospel by neo-Pentecostals has influenced and attracted other Christian denominations, both the classical Pentecostals and the mainline churches, to do the same. However, if the notion of the kingdom of

¹³² An interview with Rev. Dickson Tufuor Sarpong.

God is perceived and taught in this sense, then one question that comes to mind is how these Pentecostals understand the mission of Jesus whether that is consistent with the prosperity.

GENDER AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

What has gender got to do with the issue of the kingdom of God in Ghana's new Christianity? From the discussions above we realized that the classical Pentecostals mostly tend to emphasize the spirituality of the kingdom of God and so insist on the need for the adherents to observe a life of holiness. Now, the latter also hold the view that the inclusion of women in the top leadership of the church undermines the spiritual authority of the church. Of course church's failure to involve women in leadership position can be attributed to the Ghanaian traditional patriarchal practice.

Both classical and neo-Pentecostals differ immensely with respect to gender equality in the church. Even among the classical Pentecostal denominations there exist extreme positions on the issue. The Church of Pentecost, of the main focus of case study in this research, for instance, do not recruit or ordain women as pastors, prophets, apostles and the like. The latter buttress their position by referring to the fact that there was no woman among Jesus' 12 twelve key disciples who eventually became the twelve apostles of the early church. The leadership of the church is a male dominant one – the highest rank women can attain in the local assembly is a deaconess.¹³³ Meanwhile, in other classical Pentecostal churches, like the Apostolic Church and the Assemblies of God, women ordination is permitted. However, the fact remains that even though these classical Pentecostal churches record more women than men, there is an extreme gender imbalance in their leadership against women – they have female majority in terms of membership but male-dominated leaders.

Also, in the classical Pentecostal churches, there are many restrictions on the dressings of women. For instance, women are obliged to cover their hair in worship services and forbidden from wearing trousers. Just after he had taken the office, the new chairman of the Church of Pentecost issued a statement which sought to relax the church's strict position on women

¹³³ Another classical Pentecostal church that maintains the same position as the Church of Pentecost is the Christ Apostolic Church, purported to be the oldest indigenous classical Pentecostal church in Ghana.

wearing trousers. This generated a heated debate within the rank and file of the church. Those who are against the chairman's motion argue that allowing young ladies to worship the Almighty God at the holy place in "worldly fashion"¹³⁴ was not the best way of attracting the youth to the church. One example is a man who wrote in *The Chronicle*, one of the popular and biggest Ghanaian Newspapers, referring to 1 John 2:15-17, among others, to support his argument allowing the youth to attend services and worship the omnipotent God in the Church with provocative dresses, would attract the wrath of God. The latter quotation states: "Love not the world, neither the things in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the father, but of the world." Hence, he admonished the Pentecost Church to take a second look at the decree, since it was not the best way of drawing the youth to the church.¹³⁵

The gender inequality is also portrayed in the Church of Pentecost, particularly, in the sitting rules of the church. Women and men sit separately and the deacons with the elders sit on the platform or high table of the church and the deaconesses sit separate on one side of the room. The following table is a rough sketch of the seating arrangement in the church:

¹³⁴ For most classical Pentecostals in Ghana "worldly fashion" includes women wearing trousers or men's dress and vice versa. It has also to do with dresses that expose the vital parts of the body which arouses sexual passions in the opposite sex.

¹³⁵ An online publication made by *The Chronicle*, one of the popular and biggest Ghanaian Newspapers in Modern Ghana webpage: <http://www.modernghana.com/news/268719/1/what-crime-has-the-church-of-pentecost-committed.html> - Assessed on 09 January 2013.

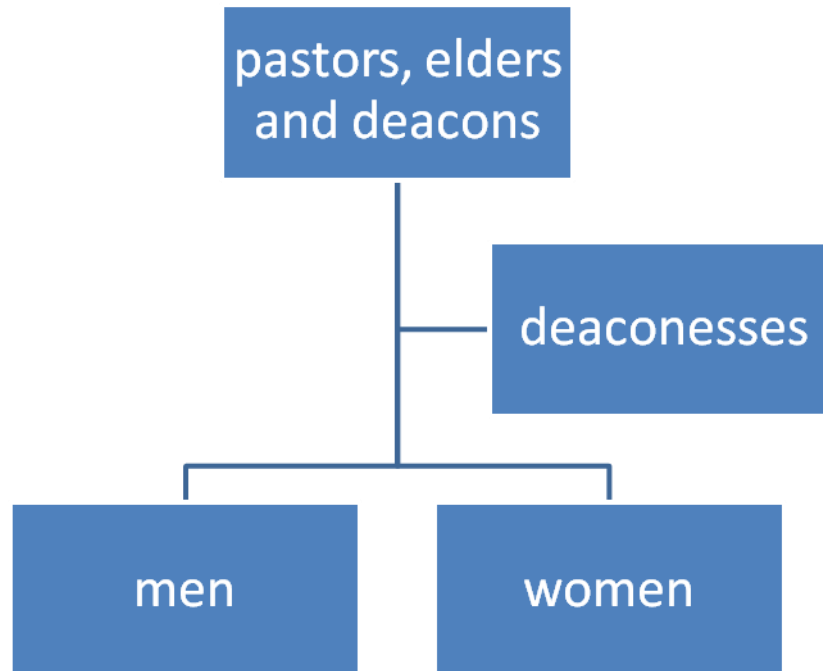


Table 5: Seating Arrangement in Typical Classical Pentecostal Church in Ghana

In addition, the church forbids the dancing of women and men together during praises and worship of the service. Both groups are supposed to take in turns according to the seating arrangement to dance in the open space in front. The reason for such rules is to prevent sexual arousal in the men during and even after worship services. Thus, the idea is to minimize or prevent any form of sexual temptation by women in church. This position portrays women as vulnerable and therefore that can be easily used by the devil to cause men to sin through. What is the theological basis of the classical Pentecostals' position on gender inequality in the church? Paul's admonition in First Corinthians 14: 33b – 35 and First Timothy 2: 12, among others, seem to be the basis. The references are as follows:

First Corinthians 14: 33b – 35:

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

First Timothy 2: 12:

I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

Is there a possibility that Paul the apostle is understood differently by the classical Pentecostals? Contextually, does Paul's statement fit in the situation of these churches or he is taken out of context? What is the prevailing cultural position of gender in Ghana? To what extent are the indigenous cultural practices against women a challenge to gender equality in Ghanaian Christianity? The discussion in chapter six of the thesis addresses some of the basic issues.

Comparatively, there is a high degree of equality of gender within the neo-Pentecostal churches compared to the classical Pentecostal churches. Women usually serve as co-pastors (or even senior pastors) with their husbands and even founders or head pastors of their denominations. Women are ordained to pastor churches on their own with or without husbands. In contrast, in the classical Pentecostal churches, particularly in the Church of Pentecost and Christ Apostolic Church, women are subordinates of men in every aspects of life – in church leadership and in family life.

Also, in the neo-Pentecostal churches, dress is never a doctrine or an issue at all; no one cares about what women wear to church though modesty is emphasized. The seating arrangement is a mixed one; both women and men dance together – there is no particular order followed as compared to that of the classical Pentecostal churches. This belief is based on Paul's statements in the Letter to the Galatians (3: 26 – 29) saying: 'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor Greek, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*'¹³⁶ And in the spiritual equality of Christian believers, Jane E. Soothill, writing from gender and religious perspective, argues that 'in terms of the spiritual status of men and women it is a widely held view within the born-again churches that women, as well as men, were made in the image of God, and thus share with men all the fruits of creation and "equal heritage with all men in the Royal Priesthood"'.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Reference is taken from the New International Version of the Bible. Emphasis is mine.

¹³⁷ See Soothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power*, pp.109 – 10.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the above discourse focuses on some of the theological reflections and positions of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana on the meaning of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God and the prosperity gospel, the mission of Jesus, and the kingdom of God Gender. I have indicated some significant differences regarding the positions of both the classical and neo Pentecostal churches, but these differences do not result in any tension whatsoever between them. In fact, there is rather a degree of influence of the neo-Pentecostals on the classical ones and even on Ghana's Christianity as a whole, particularly, when it comes to the quest for material prosperity. It is no doubt today that almost every church or denomination places emphasis on the need for economic empowerment of the adherents. The kingdom of God, among other things, carries a transformative force or power to affect, positively, the socio-economic status of the participants. How then do these churches perceive poverty and handle the poor within and without them? The following chapter seeks to respond to this question.

Chapter 4

THE CHURCH AND THE POOR

INTRODUCTION

Poverty, undoubtedly, is a menace in most African societies. And I have pointed out in the historical chapter that one of the primary causes of poverty in Ghana, as well as Africa, is the *historical suffering*¹³⁸ which was inflicted by colonialism in the past. Colonialism left most societies of Africa highly impoverished and thus life is more or less based on survival of the fittest. Most people in Ghana struggle to make ends meet right from childhood, making them aggressive and craving for riches or wealth. As a result, the success of leadership performances (be it political, religious or socio-economic) is measured on the basis of how they have been able to improve the living conditions of the populace, followers and the family. So, whenever a leader amasses wealth and lives extravagant life, no matter the popularity of the person, she or he is considered a bad leader in the sight of the people – one who does not have the followers' interest at heart. The primary question that the chapter addresses is: *To what extent has the neo-Pentecostals been able to socio-economically aid the poor to come out of poverty? How is the church helping society to curb the poverty menace?* Indeed, poverty as subject has become the basis of the prevailing prosperity messages in most pulpits in Ghana as well as in most African countries. In this chapter, I will discuss how both the classical and the neo-Pentecostal churches handle or treat the poor within and without their churches. Then, in order to understand the phenomenon of poverty and the poor, I will also describe the perceptions of the neo-Pentecostal churches regarding the meaning of poverty, the causes of poverty, and how they teach their adherents to come out of poverty.

¹³⁸ This is a borrowed phrase and idea from Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 29.

CARING FOR THE POOR

The poor here should be defined as those who lack economically – the economically lacked people; those who literally struggle to afford two meals a day. Indeed, a careful observation shows that about seventy to eighty percent of the population of most neo-Pentecostal churches can be described as people who are saddled with the challenges poverty and sicknesses. Most people are found in these churches simply because of the leadership promises of their ability to aid them overcome their problems – ‘Come to my church and I promise you will never be the same; all your sorrows will turn into laughter’, they claim. Whereas some neo-Pentecostal churches have no practices means of assisting the poor economically, others have a form of assistance. My interactions with the Pastors interviewed showed that there are some who feel they have some social obligation to the poor and try to put forward some schemes to assist them.

Micro-Loan Support

One of the ways by which the poor is assisted is by giving them some form of micro-loans to enable them set up small scale businesses or micro-businesses. These loans are to be paid back to the church within some period of time. With this, one respondent relates that they do invite those who are in need and ask them about what they would like to do in terms of starting some micro business. Start up money is given to them and they are expected to pay back the money after some time. Some usually default in payment and finds it difficult to show up in church, but others pay back.¹³⁹ It must be noted that such practice is not open in most of the churches since by doing so, most people may come forward to ask for financial assistance. Some pastors were of the view that such practice should be kept secret because the church does not have enough funds to assist everyone who may need help.

Church Banquets or Picnics

Church banquets or picnics are occasions set out by most churches for what some refer to as “get-together” or fellowship among members. There are several ways by which such functions are organized. Some prefer to rent a banquet hall, engage services of a caterer and asked

¹³⁹ I had an interview with Rev. John Bofo of Word of Faith Christian Center, Koforidua, on August 6, 2012.

members to pay to participate. This type automatically excludes the poor. That is, those who cannot afford to pay cannot participate as well. Others ask members to bring their own special meal and they enjoy together. Some others still prepare a common meal and everyone partakes of that. One respondent narrates what they do to assist the poor in their church:

The Bible is full of parables that Jesus used to illustrate his messages. The parable of the great banquet in Matthew 22: 1 – 10 and Luke 14: 16 – 21 resonates with the story of the poor and the poverty that is the result of sin, and lack which only the gospel can cure. That is why when anyone comes to Christ, they feel that kind of fulfillment – there is water to drink; food to eat and so on. If you preach to people and they are still dying of hunger, you have not completed your work.

Once awhile, the church organizes banquet. The beginning of this year, for instance, the church slaughtered cows and prepared meals for all members of the church. This is done to usher the members into a new year. It is the desire the desire of the church to expand this occasion to include outsiders.

Also, every first day of December, it is the policy of the church to give out parcels in the form of food items and flowers to all the sick, aged, and widows of the church. During this occasion, all these people are driven home by members who have cars. Again, this is now restricted to members and we hope to include outsiders in future.

Furthermore, at the end of every year, the church organizes what is referred to “Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh” where funds are raised. 90% of the funds realized are used to help the poor. Some orphanages as well as needy homes are donated with food items; prisoners are served with food and toiletries. This is part of the social responsibilities of the church. We believe that after people are ministered to spiritually, they must also be ministered to physically.

The church also has a scholarship scheme which began couples of years ago. It was instituted by Dr. Menas Otabil, the Head Pastor, as a result of the suffering he encountered during his school days. He did not want others to go through the same. So, all branches of the church are obliged to contribute to the scheme. 10% of offerings from what is dubbed “Musical Aid” go to the “Central Aid”. Out of the Central Aid, about 200

pupils, irrespective of their religious beliefs or affiliation, are offered scholarships to enable them study with less difficulty. This has been so beneficial.¹⁴⁰

However, one can easily notice that the banquets are usually organized for church members, and in some cases, it is only those who can afford to pay that do participate. This means the poor hardly participate in banquets. Also, the only outsiders who may be invited are friends of the church members. Thus, the banquets, organized by most of these neo-Pentecostal churches, are restricted to members (who are able to pay), friends and special invited guests.

Besides their occasional and random gestures towards aiding the economically poor within their denominations, the neo-Pentecostals also, as their social responsibilities to the poor outside the church, make donations in cash and in kind to orphanages, psychiatric hospitals and other institutions of need. Comparatively, some of the classical Pentecostal churches have institutionalized departments which take care of the socio-economic needs of people.

For instance, the Church of Pentecost, the fastest classical denomination in Ghana, has a department called Pentecost Social Service (PENTSOS) which seeks to promote and support communities and individuals in their efforts at improving their economic lives. PENTSOS also seeks to promote and support communities and individuals in their efforts at improving their socio-economic lives. It also seeks to provide charitable services to the deprived and marginalized communities and individuals, the disabled and the widowed; irrespective of colour, creed or religious affiliation.¹⁴¹ However, in my fieldwork, a contrary picture was painted by one of the presiding elders of the church. According to this elder, even though the Church has a department which serves as a relief agency, there are lots of poor people in the church whose needs are not attended to, and this does not appear to be the concern of the pastorate of the Church. He further narrated:

The poor do grumble and confide in few members but do not come out boldly to air their views. The leadership (particularly, the pastors and the rich ones) of the church do not virtually show care and concern to the poor when they come to church. The preaching

¹⁴⁰ I had an interview with Rev. Dickson Tufuor Sarpong, the Eastern Regional Pastor of the International Central Gospel Church, Koforidua, on August 3, 2012 at home office.

¹⁴¹ See webpage: http://thecophq.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6&Itemid=11: (Assessed on 26 February 2013).

appears very appealing – the Kingdom of God – but the practice is different. The poor (widows, orphans, etc) are invited to the church but they are not cared for when they do. The whole money of the church is sent to the headquarters and nothing comes back to the local congregation for any form assistance of the poor. And there are lots of widows and orphans in the local church but no one cares for them. The local church cannot really aid the poor satisfactorily since the church monies are sent to central account at the headquarters. The local church is not permitted to organize programs to aid the poor.¹⁴²

The neglect of the poor in church is also portrayed in negative social relations within various denominations.

SOCIAL RELATIONS IN THE CHURCH

In the relatively small denominations, one can easily perceive some sort of cordial relationships among members. But it is obvious in both classical and neo-Pentecostal churches that there is a division between the rich and the poor; rich people are easily identified as friends of equal status, whereas the poor are looked down upon. The division is portrayed by the business associations within the church who usually have the objective of sharing business ideas and helping each others. The poor cannot be part of such associations due their financial lacks and the fact that they may not be able make financial contributions when the need arise. Such business association is also seen as the sponsoring team of the church as whole, and most cases such people also serve as financial committee and fund raising department of the church. This leads us to the social relations in church and leadership.

In most churches encountered in this research, money plays an important place in leadership. The rich are easily given leadership position so they can support the church and the pastor financially. This picture was intimated by the responses I received from the contextual Bible studies group. The participants were of the opinion that, in their various churches, the pastors are seen to be more close to the economically rich people, probably, because of the economic gain they get from them. They describe the rich in their churches to be proud and people who seek power,

¹⁴² I had an interview with Elder Gabriel Amiteye, a District Presiding Elder of the Church of Pentecost, on August 2, 2012.

recognition and promotion wherever they find themselves; that the poor are hardly noticed or seen in leadership positions in the church. One respondent narrated that in leadership appointments, the pastors easily appoint the rich to be part of them. Anyone who raises concern about the neglect of the poor is relegated to the background and, in most cases, disqualified for any leadership position.¹⁴³ Thus, in these churches, leadership roles are distributed among those who are rich and the poor are mostly dominated by them.

An elder of a classical Pentecostal church speaks of the extent to which wealth or possession of money is dictating to leadership roles in the church. He relates that, in the church today, the issue of spiritual maturity is not considered in leadership appointments – the rich are usually considered as the first choice. The rank and file of the church concentrates on the rich. He narrated that, just recently, someone join the church and due to his sound financial status, a position was created for him to fill so that he can be closer to the pastorate for mutual benefit.¹⁴⁴

I should also state that majority of the pastors encountered in the study as well many other neo-Pentecostal and classical Pentecostal pastors or leaders will not openly admit that they usually do favour the rich in leadership distribution. Such information is best given by the lay members of the churches, and in this case, the Contextual Bible Study group. These lay members' report seems credible since they are able to give testimony regarding the significance or the impact of the ministry on them and society at large.

THE MEANING OF POVERTY

In the previous chapter, we saw that most Pentecostals (that is, both the classical and new ones) define the poor in terms of those who have not spiritually received the kingdom message; those who are not 'born-again' so to speak. However, poverty is perceived to be a demonic orchestration in and over individual's life to fail socio-economically; it is a curse over one's life which has to be broken in order to experience true well-being in this world.¹⁴⁵ Socio-economic progress cannot be attained as long as there is a curse of poverty in the family line. In fact,

¹⁴³ An interview with Kingsley Ofosu-Ntiamoah, a former elder of Living Bread and Resurrection Power Ministry, Koforidua, on August 4, 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Elder Gabriel Amiteye of the Church of Pentecost.

¹⁴⁵ These are floating and popular teachings in most neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana today.

according to most preachers of the neo-Pentecostal churches, the whole concept of the kingdom of God is fully realized in one's life only when the curse of poverty is broken or destroyed. It should also be noted that, according to the same people, poverty also leads to sicknesses and diseases, and ultimately, death. Before the discourse of how poverty over one's life is destroyed, let us look at some of the causes of poverty as perceived and taught, particularly, by the neo-Pentecostal churches.

THE CAUSE OF POVERTY

In the same way a medical doctor diagnoses the patient in order to administer the right kind of medicine, the neo-Pentecostal preacher or prophet also, either by divination or interrogation, tries to find out the cause of the curse of poverty in a client's life. In their usual deliverance or healing services, the preacher / prophets make the congregation aware of the several causes of their predicaments, and I will discuss them under three main categories as follows:

Witches

Witches, *abayifo*¹⁴⁶, are simply defined as evil spirits who operate through humans bodies to destroy lives and properties of close relations. They are considered the primary cause of poverty or suffering or even illness of poor people; also they are also seen as the ultimate enemy, *otanfo*, who has to be eliminated so the victim can enjoy or experience true well-being or prosperity in this world. A couple of years ago, as a student at the University of Ghana, I attended a student Christian Fellowship or worship meeting and the guest speaker happened to be one of the so-called Prophets. In the course of the service or ministration, the prophet called out a lady to come in front of the congregation which she did. Then the prophet told her that her 'struggles' in life was caused by her grandmother who was a witch and that she had only one choice to make out of two possibilities – she could either give the prophet the permission to kill the grandmother by evocation of death over her or she would in her grandmother's stead. Guess what was the choice of this lady?

¹⁴⁶ Abayifo, in the Fante dialect of the Akans refer to spiritual beings that cause miscarriages in pregnant women – *those remove babies or foetus*.

This is the kind of theology that defines Christianity in most African countries today – the strong belief in evil spirits – called demons or witches, who are the fundamental cause of the woes of the people. The neo-Pentecostal preachers or prophets usually teach their clients to understand and accept that the cause of their problems – poverty and sicknesses – have spiritual dimension to it. Biblical reference that is used to buttress their teaching is Ephesians 6: 12: ‘For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.’ The text is interpreted to suit their point of the reality of spiritual forces who are said to be primary cause of human suffering. However, they also teach that the spiritual forces do manifest themselves by possessing humans and use them to carry out their agenda.

Thus, the primary cause of the victim’s suffering is usually attributed to a witch or an enemy in the family whose main purpose is to hinder their progress in life. To them, until this enemy is expelled and destroyed from one’s life, the person’s well-being or prosperity (material and health) is not guaranteed. These preachers place emphasis on how powerful the witches are so as to create fear in the clients to look up to them for solution as they promise to bring the situation under control. Having succeeded in that, they then assure the clients to trust them for deliverance or freedom from the witches.

Some years back, in 2003, I attended a Sunday service of a neo-Pentecostal church called End-time Resurrection Power Ministries.¹⁴⁷ The topic for that Sunday service, according to the preacher, was *Killing all Human Enemies through Prayer*. The whole service could be described as warfare prayer service – the service consisted in the leader commanding the congregation to pray against their enemies who could possibly be a *possessed* member of one’s family. Here, the prophet taught the congregation that the sufferings – poverty and illnesses – of most of them could be attributed to an enemy, *ɔtanfo*, who hails from their respective families. He then stressed that the prayers he was going lead them to say could result in the death of family relatives, and when that happened they were forbidden to weep or mourn them. So, the service which lasted for about five hours centered on offering of *warfare prayers* which aimed at eliminating or destroying family members who are possessed with witchcraft to hinder their

¹⁴⁷ See David Stiles-Ocran, ‘Prophetism in Ghana: A Case Study of Some Charismatic Churches’, M.Phil Thesis submitted to the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, 2004, p. 118.

progress in life. This group of preachers alludes to the fact that the gospel of the kingdom is about their ability to set free the clients from demonic oppression in the form of poverty and diseases.

Ancestral Curse

Apart from witches being identified as the primary cause of most people's woes and poverty, another thing to mention is ancestral curse. Ancestral curse is perceived to be as result of the sins or wickedness of a dead relative. For instance, someone might have murdered an innocent person or maltreated a person who as a result, out of pain, has cursed the family members, especially, the children to experience suffering throughout their generations. The curse may be in the form of chronic sickness or disease, madness, financial lack or poverty, broken home or marriage, premature death and all sorts of vices which can be traced in the family line. These things are usually taught by a prophet before the exorcism or healing process, and as they teach, individual victims of any of the vices show up and approach the prophet for prayer.

Personal Responsibility

Even though the neo-Pentecostal preachers, especially those who called themselves prophets, blame the causes of poverty and sicknesses of the clients on the external spiritual forces, the individual clients are also sometimes asked to take responsibilities of their predicaments. They are asked to take stock of their lives – especially their personal sins and wickedness, the cheating, thefts, and stinginess. These preachers belief that most people suffer from poverty just because they are stingy – they do not give to God, as they usually put it. In one of my studies a couple of years ago, in King Jesus Evangelistic Ministry, the prophet exclaimed: “Poverty is killing you because you so wicked and stingy. You find it difficult to give to support the work of God!”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Personal participant observation at King Jesus Evangelistic Ministry led by Emmanuel Kwaku Apraku at Accra in June 2003. The interesting thing is that the same teachings and practices are present today in the country, particularly, in similar denominations.

HOW TO COME OUT OF POVERTY

When it comes to assisting the clients to overcome poverty, the neo-Pentecostal preachers teach and practice the following:

Giving or Offering

Whereas the classical Pentecostals stress tithing and freewill offering as main source of funds for the church, the neo-Pentecostals use giving, particularly to the prophets, as a process to reach total liberty and deliverance from poverty. Giving takes several forms. In one particular church I visited some years back; various offerings were taken with different emphasis: the prophet sold to the congregants soap, oil, honey, and lime, eggs, porridge, and sugar cubes.¹⁴⁹ Each of these items was sold through fund raising strategies and was also preceded with testimonies to create a kind of demand for it. The testimony centered on personal experience regarding effective and instant result from buying a product from the prophet and applying it according. For instance, a man of about 45 came forward to testify that he had tried several times to get a traveling visa to London but all to no avail. He came to the prophet and bought an anointing oil to pray over the application documents. He applied again this time and was given five years visa. After the testimony, the prophet walked to the stage and asked ushers to bring the anointing oil, of course, bottled with about 50ml content. He signaled the congregation that he has brought more of such miraculous oil and that whoever needed a ‘breakthrough’ in their lives (in their finances and marriages) should walk forward, put down an amount not less than a quoted one, take one oil and go use it. In most cases, one is required to specifically hand over the money to the prophet for a hand shake.

Apart from the barter form of giving, there is also a situation where individuals are charged to pay some amount of money in order to be counseled or prayed for. Here, consultation alone attracts some form of voluntary offering. And depending on the magnitude of the client’s problem, an amount is demanded to enable the prophet to fast and pray for the client. Others are instantly taken through exorcisms after the money is taken. In one case, I observed a woman who

¹⁴⁹ These are common practices in King Jesus Evangelistic Ministry, Alive Chapel International and other Prophet-led neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana.

had gone in for counseling, *akwankyerε*¹⁵⁰, and bought a bottle of oil for deliverance which took place in another room by a group of prophets or pastors.

Deliverance / Exorcism

Deliverance or exorcism is one of the main practices of both the classical and the neo Pentecostal churches. Many of these churches have prayer camps and centers where such practices are conducted. These centers are mostly places with some chalets houses and hostels usually built by the individual prophets as bedding facilities for clients who go in for prayers and deliverance. The clients usually pay for which ever type room they go in for. In the deliverance or exorcism session, one is made to recant and renounce every past covenant with familiar spirits, ancestral curse, witchcraft, water spirits and the like. As a major practice, the prophet, with his team, use the purchased oil, handkerchief or honey to administer deliverance and to empower clients for wealth or prosperity.¹⁵¹ The whole phenomenon of deliverance involves the laying on of hands by a prophet or a team of prayer group on the client or victim and commanding of evil spirits to leave to leave to them. This process sometimes leads to the unconsciousness or weakness of the victim, signifying their freedom. It also results vomiting, screaming, hissing, backing and rolling of the victim. In many cases, the victim become extremely violent and thrown to the floor or even hurt. Any physical injury is considered to have been caused by evil in the patient. After deliverance, clients are also encouraged to attend what is usually referred to “Anointing Service”.

Anointing Service

Let me start the description of this phenomenon – Anointing Service – by stating two very popular scriptural references, first, in Isaiah 10: 27: ‘It shall come to pass in that day that his burden shall be taken away from your shoulder; and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing oil.’¹⁵² And second reference is James 5: 14: ‘Is anyone

¹⁵⁰ The term literally means “giving directions”. See Stiles-Ocran, p. 125.

¹⁵¹ See Stiles-Ocran, p. 75.

¹⁵² This is a New King James Version of the Bible.

among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.’¹⁵³

One common practice within the neo-Pentecostal churches which is characterized by money transactions is what they usually refer to as “the Anointing Service”.¹⁵⁴ It is believed among most neo-Pentecostals that during this form of service the adherents are set free from all forms of financial challenges and diseases. It is usually a culmination of either 21-day or a week long fasting and prayer programme on healing and deliverance or conferences which run on themes like “Breaking the Curse of Poverty and Sickness”, “Woman, Thou Art Loosed”, “Experiencing Total Freedom”, “Deliverance from the Power of Darkness”, “Experiencing Financial Freedom”, “12 Principles of Financial Prosperity”, “Understanding Financial Prosperity”, “Exploring the Secrets of Success”, “Success Strategies”, “Breaking Financial Hardships”, “Anointing for Breakthrough”, “Anointing for Exploits” and the like. Most of these themes are also developed into books for sale during the services.¹⁵⁵

The whole programme centers around a preacher who claims to possess the knowledge and the ability to change the adverse situations of their clients to a better one; he claims to have the skill to give certain directives so as bring about prosperity and success in the lives of the adherents. Most of these preachers have not taken any degree course in Management, Marketing, or Business Administration but, looking at the themes, they teach their clients business principles. In the following lines, I have described how the services are conducted:

During the anointing service emphasis is placed on testimonies¹⁵⁶ from adherents. Here, a member who is believed to have participated in the previous anointing service, followed the instructions or the teachings, and has realized a change, is called upon to give a personal testimony. Such individuals are carefully selected and are trained or coached to give their testimonies. This means that there is an assisting group of the prophet who first listens the

¹⁵³ This is a New King James Version of the Bible.

¹⁵⁴ See Stiles-Ocran, pp. 76 – 77.

¹⁵⁵ Some of the books are authored by David O. Oyedepo, a popular Nigerian prosperity preacher whose influence is strongly felt in contemporary Christianity in Ghana and West Africa.

¹⁵⁶ Testimony time is an item on service liturgy where individual adherents are given the opportunity to share with rest of the congregation about what “the Lord has done for them” as a result of a prayer said the Prophet / Pastor, and or a deliverance from a situation. This time is actually considered as a motivating moment for new comers to put their faith in the “Lord” and in the “Prophet”.

testimonies and chooses which one would be good for the occasion. In most cases, the testimonies are re-structured to suit the occasion. The stress is on the fact that the person acted on or obeyed the words of the prophet and this resulted in a positive change – financial prosperity or healing. Thus, in the testimony, you must tell the congregation the specific things that the prophet asked you to do which brought about the change. Personal testimonies are meant to arouse the interest or desire in people to receive the message of the day and be ready to perform a leap of faith to act on whatever directive that is given by the prophet.

After the testimony, the preacher or the prophet mounts the podium and first shares more light on the given testimony and the importance of heeding to his directives during the ministration. He then goes on to the main theme of the service and spontaneously beacon on the people to perform leap of faith to give him, usually, a high amount of money, say one thousand Ghana Cedis which is equal to about 3000 Norwegian Kroner. Usually, the prophet would ask for about 50 people to give such amount each. The appeal runs from such a high amount to the lowest amount you can think. The idea is that those who able to give him the money are prayed for to receive divine impartation for financial prosperity. There is a popular Akan maxim that is also used to buttress the authenticity of the involvement of money - *Wo de nam na wɔdeti nam* – which literally means ‘In order to catch a fish one needs a bait.’ The services are organized in an enticing and compelling way such that the poor will even borrow money to give for ‘anointing’. The prophet uses oil to anoint whoever gives accordingly.

It must be noted that the practice of such ‘the anointing service’ is mostly associated with the neo-Pentecostal churches and not very popular with the classical Pentecostals. Even though, there are traces of such practices that are perceived to be infiltrating into the liturgical structure of the classical Pentecostal churches, it is not a common practice compared to the neo-Pentecostals.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, from the above presentation, we can establish the point that the objective of both the classical and neo-Pentecostal churches’ preaching of the gospel (of the kingdom) is not to aid the poor. Most of the churches’ income is rather used to enrich the pastors, and indeed, most pastors

of the popular Pentecostal churches in Ghana are materially rich. An elder of the Church of Pentecost puts it this way: Instead of using a percentage of the income to cater for the poor, this is not done. The funds are used for infrastructural developments and buying of cars for the leaders; the local branches of the church are mandated to build mansions for our area heads as well as pastors and buy cars for them. So a careful evaluation shows that most of the church's funds go into personal use of the pastors rather than the welfare of the poor.¹⁵⁷ The last drop of money is rather extorted from the poor in the name of delivering them from poverty and sicknesses; they are made to give out of their afflictions with the aim of becoming better once the prophets receive the money. But, the more they give the poorer they become. Some may be forced to give a testimony of a perceived change, but in most cases, the changes are never visible in real life situation.

In an attempt to address the challenges of the economically poor in their midst, some churches try to make donations and sponsor individuals who may approach them for assistance to enable them to start a micro business or even to pay their ward's educational expenses. It should be noted that the leaders or pastors of most of the churches under study are individuals with very poor economic backgrounds; most of them tell their survival stories to portray how they have suffered and battled with poverty till their so-called better position as church leaders. And from observation, most of the pastors are still struggling with poverty and are pressing their members or adherents to give to aid the church; when the church is rich, then they are rich. Some of the pastors teach their followers that they, as pastors or leaders, will have to be rich first so the members follow suit.

With this kind of attitude, some of the pastors have risen from the pit of poverty to the palace of wealth; they tell their testimonies to challenge the poor to follow their example and give to the church. Thus, the poor in the churches are not cared for; rather they are exploited and abused. The following chapter discusses the prosperity gospel and the functioning of the neo-Pentecostal leaders.

¹⁵⁷ Elder Gabriel Amiteye of the Church of Pentecost.

Chapter 5

THE GOSPEL OF PROSPERITY AND THE FUNCTIONING OF THE NEO-PENTECOSTAL LEADERS

INTRODUCTION

It is indeed obvious from the preceding chapters that neo-Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana is characterized with its extreme emphasis on prosperity – the belief that the kingdom of God is not only about gaining entrance into eternity but also experiencing good health and material well-being as a believer. Some theologians have viewed the prosperity gospel as a major threat to contemporary Christianity, especially, to the traditional gospel teachings which emphasize repentance from dead works, faith towards Jesus Christ and life of righteousness in this world with aim of uniting with God in eternity. Robert M. Franklin¹⁵⁸ commences his article with conviction that “The single greatest threat to the historical legacy and core values of the contemporary black church tradition is posed by what is known as the “prosperity gospel” movement.’¹⁵⁹ Franklin considers the prosperity gospel as ‘a more thorough and comprehensive distortion of the religion of Jesus.’¹⁶⁰ ‘Poor people were central to Jesus’ own self-definition, but they are often relegated to one of many service programs of today’s corporate church, simply another item on the service menu.’

On the contrary, for most neo-Pentecostal preachers in Ghana and Africa, the prosperity gospel is the true prophetic gospel to the people of the continent and believers worldwide. David O. Oyedepo, a Nigeria-based pastor and the president of the Living Faith Ministries Inc. writes in his book *Understanding Financial Prosperity*:

I am not a preacher of prosperity, I am a prophet. God spoke specifically to me while I was away in America for a meeting, “*Get down home and make My people rich!*” That is why the things I teach are not

¹⁵⁸ Robert M. Franklin is an African-American Educator, a theologian and was the Presidential Distinguished Professor of Social Ethics at Emory University (2004 – 2007).

¹⁵⁹ See Robert M. Franklin, “The Gospel of Bling”, in *Sojourners Magazine*; Jan 2007; 36, 1, p. 19.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Franklin further argues that to ‘be a successful (different from faithful) pastor in today’s world is to confront the ever-present temptation to sell one’s soul, compromising one’s vocation and ethical responsibilities, in exchange for or access to wealth.’

the regular prosperity preacher's syllabus. They are divine impartations to make you a celebrity on the earth. Why? I am sent! Prosperity is one of the twelve-pillar messages of the Commission... I have seen God in the realm of prosperity since then, that's why He has sent me to go and turn the destinies of men around. I am sent not only to teach it, but effect it, so that when you hear what God is saying through me, and you apply yourself to it, there is no way you won't be free.¹⁶¹

The fact remains that the prosperity gospel has had both positive and negative effects on most African societies, especially, Nigeria and Ghana. In this chapter, I will discuss some definitions of the prosperity gospel and also looked at a brief historical background and theological basis of the phenomenon in United States, Nigeria and Ghana. I will also discuss some of the reasons for which the phenomenon has been gaining root in Africa. The chapter further responds to the question of the impact of the prosperity gospel on the Ghanaian as well as African societies. In all these discussions, the attitudes of the leaders as well as the teachers / preachers of the prosperity gospel are also examined. I will also end with some critical comments.

Prosperity Gospel

Lexically, the term *prosperity* has been defined in several ways: 'the condition of being successful or thriving; *especially*, economic well-being'¹⁶²; 'the state of being successful usually by making a lot of money'¹⁶³; and it also means 'a successful, flourishing, or thriving condition, especially in financial respects; good fortune.'¹⁶⁴ The term *gospel* on the other hand is simply the good news of salvation which is encrypted in the life of Christ Jesus; it is 'the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles'; it is also about 'something regarded as true and implicitly believed.'¹⁶⁵ So we see the reason for which prosperity has been understood in terms of being economically successful; the well-being of the individual or a group. However, one wonders how the two different terms – prosperity and gospel – were put together. But the answer may be obvious in that, the gospel is associated with something that is true and does not fail and also that which saves. Hence, the prosperity gospel proposes that believing and acting on the word of God can

¹⁶¹ See David O. Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity* (Nigeria: Dominion Publication House, 2005), pp. 14 – 15.

¹⁶² Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prosperity> - (Assessed on 5 March 2013).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ See Dictionary.com: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/prosperity?s=t> – (Assessed on 5 March 2013).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/gospel?s=t> – (Assessed on 6 March 2013)

lead the believer to true economic success and salvation. Let's do some outline of the doctrines which also account for the sources of this combination.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

There is no doubt that the prosperity gospel is actually a product of the faith gospel movement which traces its origins to the United States in the years between 1960s and 1970s and that also 'appeals to the "Western materialistic mindset".¹⁶⁶ According to Dan Liroy¹⁶⁷, 'These were the days when living standards were visibly increasing, opportunity was everywhere, and "success through a positive mental attitude" was the rule. Indeed, the Faith Gospel's affinities to New Age thinking are obvious.'¹⁶⁸ The whole phenomenon has, historically, had a large number of faith preachers like Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, E. W. Kenyon, A. A. Allen, Oral Roberts, T. L. Osborn, all of United States, and others.¹⁶⁹ The whole phenomenon emerged as one of the many religious expressions of basic American optimism about the inexhaustible potential of the New World; a place where all dreams and hopes are being realized and fulfilled.

Through the inspirational books, pamphlets, audio tapes, and televangelism of the movement from the United States, the continent of Africa got caught by the teachings of the prosperity gospel, practiced it and now have become a common feature of her Christianity. In Ghana today, most of Christian book shops feature commonly literatures, DVDs, and audio tapes of Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Joel Osteen, T. D. Jakes and many other American "Big Preachers". Some of these "Big Preachers" like Benn Inn and Morris Cerullo visited the country's capital, Greater Accra, quite recently for crusades and healing rallies. One can imagine the crowd they attract at these rallies.

¹⁶⁶ See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 40. See also Dan Liroy, "The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel: Self or Savior?" (2007, September), *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary*. 4 [Refereed e-journal]: <http://www.satsonline.org/content/theological-research-conspectus>. (Assessed on 7 March 2013)

¹⁶⁷ Dan Liroy is an American Professor and New Testament scholar.

¹⁶⁸ See Gifford, *African Christianity*, p. 40.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 38.

Another source of influence of the prosperity gospel in Ghana is the Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity from Nigeria which was also a response to and an extension of the American electronic mass media in the 1980s. Notable personalities are the late Archbishop Benson Idahosa, founder of the Church of God Mission International with headquarters in Benin City, Nigeria. His frequent visit to Ghana for massive crusades and leadership seminars led to the training of the Archbishop Nicholas Duncan Williams, the father of Charismatic Ministries in Ghana and an advocate of the prosperity gospel. In 1978, Nicholas Duncan-Williams was offered scholarship to the Bible College of Benson Idahosa in Nigeria and returned in 1979. Paul Gifford records that his ‘church’s theology is the faith gospel of success, health and wealth.’¹⁷⁰ In the early 1980s, Duncan-Williams started his Christian Action Faith Ministry and expounded his prosperity teachings and is now seen as a Father of most popular Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal preachers like Dag Heward Mills of the Lighthouse Chapel International, Robert Ampiah-Koffie of the Global Revival Ministries, Sam Korankye Ankrah of the Royalhouse Chapel International, Eastwood Anaba of the Fountain Gate Chapel and many others.

Another popular early faith gospel preacher in Ghana is Mensa Otabil of the International Central Gospel Church which commenced in February 1984. Gifford describes him in the following words:

This, too, is a faith gospel church, or recognizably comes from that stable. For example, Otabil began his sermon on 2 May 1993 by saying: ‘God blesses us according to our deposits. If you haven’t deposited anything, you have no right to ask for anything... People think that you should give so that the church has money. No. The main purpose is that you enter into a covenant so the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will meet all your needs’. His sermon that day was entitled ‘Power at Work within us’, and its text was . Ephesians 1: 20 –23:...¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ See Paul Gifford, ‘Ghana’s Charismatic Churches’ in *Journal of Religion in Africa* Vol. XXIV – Fasc. 3 (Leiden: Brill, August 1994), pp. 242 – 243. The prosperity gospel is ‘obvious from Duncan-Williams’ recent book, *You are Destined to Succeed!*’ Gifford quoted Duncan-Williams that ‘The Word of God is tree of life that will produce riches, honour, promotion and joy’, and also says that, in ‘his support he quotes all the high priests of the prosperity movement, Robert Schuller, Oral Roberts, Casey Treat, John Avancini, Kenneth Hagin, T. L. Osborn, Paul Yonggi Cho’, and his own mentor Idahosa. See p. 243.

¹⁷¹ See Gifford, ‘Ghana’s Charismatic Churches’, p. 245.

Furthermore, another Nigerian neo-Pentecostal and prosperity gospel preacher of influence on Ghanaian Christianity is David O. Oyedepo¹⁷² of the Living Faith Worldwide Inc. Through his Word of Faith Bible Institute, thousands of pastors and church leaders have been indoctrinated with the prosperity teachings throughout the country. He is also noted as a main speaker for annually business summit in both Nigeria and Ghana which attracts tens of thousands from the two countries. Members of his church – Winners Chapel International – are easily recognized with stickers reading *I AM A WINNER* on the back their cars, in front of shops and stores, and even in their homes. Oyedepo's prosperity messages are also published as books with titles like *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, *Success Systems*, *Winning the War Against Poverty*, *Walking in Dominion*, *Possessing Your Possession*, *Success Strategies*, *Understanding Your Covenant Right*, *Exploring the Riches of Redemption*, *Breaking Financial Hardship*, *Showers of Blessing*, and many others. These books are sold throughout all Christian bookstores in Ghana. For most of these "Big Preachers", the gospel of the kingdom of God is expressed in their theology of the prosperity gospel.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Of course, the main question is: *what is the thrust of the prosperity gospel?* What entails the prosperity teachings? I have responded to these questions by capturing the doctrines from United States, Nigeria and Ghana, that they are not much different from one another.

The Word of Faith / The Faith Gospel Teachings from United States

The faith gospel teaching asserts that Christians have the power to control their physical well-being and financial fortunes through their faith. It assumes that the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus gave Christians the ability to live in total victory, financial prosperity, and perfect health.¹⁷³ However, God's "hands are tied" from blessing many Christians who lack faith and misappropriate biblical principles, thus explaining why all Christians are not experiencing

¹⁷² David O. Oyedepo is a the presiding bishop and founder of the Living Faith Worldwide Inc. and the Winners Chapel International with its headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria.

¹⁷³ See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 38.

prosperous and healthy lives.¹⁷⁴ The faith preachers argue that once believers strengthen their faith by meditating, memorizing and confessing scriptures, they are able to live in total victory and control their physical and financial destiny.

The adherents of the faith gospel 'insist that faith is a supernatural force that believers use to get whatever form of personal success they want, including physical health and material wealth. Faith is also claimed to be the medium through which the full power of the Holy Spirit is unleashed.'¹⁷⁵ This indeed is based on a 'theology of the spoken word (rhematology)',¹⁷⁶. Clients are challenged to take the word of God, especially, aspects that favours their situation, make confessions over their lives until the desired outcomes are realized. They believe that health is the right of all Christian believers and that through the crucifixion and the death of Christ Jesus, the actual good health can be experienced in their lives (Isaiah 53: 1 – 6; Matthew 8: 17; 1 Peter 2: 24).¹⁷⁷

The prosperity gospel, similarly, is a central part of the Faith Gospel teachings and suggests that God wants all believers to prosper financially and will bless them according to their faith. In the 1980s it resonated with millions of Americans already hypnotized by the burgeoning consumer culture of the Reagan era and the explosion of wealth inflamed by the rise of Wall Street, producing a booming financial prosperity. The rapid rise of blacks to the middle and upper classes in the 1980s happened so suddenly that they were not socialized by the rigid cultural blueprint of the black aristocracy that had been in place, prescribing Catholic, Presbyterian, or Episcopalian churches for social cachet and networking opportunities. As a result, almost every city nationwide has at least one black neo-Pentecostal megachurch where middle-class and wealthy African Americans worship, network, and put their skills and talents to use. Prosperity teachings allow them to enjoy their wealth and consumerism as their rightful inheritance as God's faithful children.

¹⁷⁴ See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁵ See Dan Liroy, "The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel", p. 42.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 43.

The Nigerian Influence

As noted earlier, one notable preacher of the faith gospel who has had enormous impact on Ghana's neo-Pentecostal Christianity is the late Archbishop Benson Idahosa¹⁷⁸. He was obviously influenced by the American Word of Faith teachings. He was known as the father of faith due to his reliance and stress on faith in all his teachings during healing campaigns and leadership seminars for Pastors where he also expounded the principles of prosperity. I attended a conference organized by the National Association of Charismatic Churches in Ghana which featured Idahosa as the main speaker. The conference was about 'Having a Breakthrough in Ministry' and the main scripture reference was Psalm 23. From this reference, Idahosa underscored the fact that prosperity is a biblical phenomenon; that those who do not read the Bible carefully usually do criticize them as preaching false doctrines – prosperity, and for him, prosperity the fruit of the true believer who lives by faith. His teachings on faith were captured in books authored by him such as *Faith Can Change Your Destiny*, *Faith For All Life's Storms*, *Faith to Change the World*, *I Choose to Change: Scriptural Way to Success and Prosperity*, and *If Your Faith Says Yes, God Will Not Say No*.

Indirectly responding to the critics of the prosperity and faith gospel, Idahosa gave a scenario that anyone who has never tasted sweetness of honey can easily condemn it as poisonous. But to change the mentality of such a person Idahosa suggested to make a finger drop of honey on their lips during their sleep and tell them when they wake up that the taste on their lips was honey. He said, their attitude will suddenly change towards honey and then will never condemn it. So is the case of those who have never tasted true riches. Idahosa further stated that by faith the church can have possession of any property that it wants and no devil dare to challenge them. Financial prosperity is realized through the principle of faith just as miracles. He said that poverty is a disease that has crippled Africans and the church within the continent for far too long and that the time had come for them to chase it out and take possession of riches of the land.

After much emphasis on faith and financial prosperity along with the boast of his material possessions – new models of cars, lands, and building, Idahosa concluded with the secret of financial prosperity which was the *sowing of seed-faith* which of course was immediately

¹⁷⁸ Benson Idahosa was a Charismatic preacher and the founder of the Church of God Mission International with its headquarters in Benin city, Nigeria.

followed by demonstration of faith in offering in a form of appeal. Here, individuals were challenged to give according to the quoted amount and had to walk forward to give to him personally so that they could get the blessing directly from him or at his hand.

Another person who is presently influence the prosperity gospel move in Ghana and most African countries is Pastor Chris Oyakilome. The later's video clips are usually shown in the many branches of the ministry – Christ Embassy – through the regional capitals of Ghana and also his inspirational books and devotionals are sold throughout the country. Let us go back to look at some of Oyedepo's prosperity teachings.

In the first place, as indicated by his words quoted earlier, Oyedepo claims to be a prophet who has been sent by God to teach and make his adherents rich. In the book, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, Oyedepo raises a question of choice between being a lender or being a borrower, between begging and lending. His response is that the Scriptures alludes to the fact that your heavenly Father knows you need these things (Matthew 6: 32), and that one need not pretend that he or she does not need those things that God has said we need. He indicates that, according to Joshua 1: 8, each man's prosperity is made by him.¹⁷⁹ He buttresses his point referring to an American prosperity celebrity John Osteen in the following words: 'Two years ago, John Osteen was led by the Spirit of God and he started a teaching session on prosperity in his church and poverty was swallowed up in victory in that assembly! God's people flourished, the kingdom of God progressed and amazing things happened. The same will happen to you too (2 Corinthians 8: 9).'¹⁸⁰

According to Oyedepo, poverty is an assault to Christianity; it should not be found in the church. The redeemed ought to be rich and display wealth as a proof of redemption or salvation. 'Poverty-mentality is satanic slavery!'¹⁸¹ And, according to him, prosperity is the identity of the Christian believer and failure to display wealth is being a misfit in the kingdom of God. In other words, the mark of the people of the kingdom of God is material prosperity and the lack of it is a mark of disqualification. He writes,

¹⁷⁹ See Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 15 – 16.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 17.

One day, by such an encounter, God picked me out of poverty, and threw me into the realms of prosperity...; sorrow-free and God-given kingdom prosperity. Come with me, as I take you into the secret house of wealth. Until you are able to lay hold on His commandments, you never become a commander. I make bold to say that I am a commander in the realm of wealth. I don't beg, I don't pray for money, I don't borrow. I only line up myself with His commandments, and it just keeps flowing!¹⁸²

It is interesting to note that, for Oyedepo, diligence in business is not of much importance in this kind of prosperity acquisition; it sounds like magic just reading and confessing His commandments and money begins to drop on you. No wonder, a couple of years ago, most of his adherents upheld the view that when you just anoint your pocket with oil, usually sold at the church, and went out for the day, you would surely return with your pocket full of money by the close of the day. So, financial prosperity, wealth and success, for Oyedepo, are the outcome of a *born again*¹⁸³ Christian. 'Once you are born again, you become God's child, and you are automatically granted access to His secrets.'¹⁸⁴ And, for him, 'It is the secrets of God that make stars in the kingdom.'¹⁸⁵

But how does one gain access to this financial prosperity? After arousing the curiosity of readers, and usually his audience, Oyedepo alludes that financial prosperity in the kingdom of God is not attained by fasting and prayers, not even by one's type of business, rather it is by one's 'understanding and practice of covenant details!'¹⁸⁶ He further relates that if one cares to sign the covenant with God, his or her 'Christianity will take on brighter colours, because the power of wealth is released on the platform of the covenant of prosperity.'¹⁸⁷ But what is this understanding that he is referring to? It is the understanding of the covenant of sowing and reaping or seedtime and harvest time based on Genesis 8: 22, part of the covenant God made with Noah: 'While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and

¹⁸² See Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, p. 6.

¹⁸³ The phrase *Born Again*, popularly used within the Pentecostal and charismatic circles, to describe those who believe in and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and personal Savior.

¹⁸⁴ See David O. Oyedepo, *Success Systems* (Nigeria: Dominion Publishing House, 2006), p. 21.

¹⁸⁵ See Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, p. 17.

¹⁸⁶ See Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, p. 23. He further explains that 'A covenant as it were, is like a contract. So it involves two or more people. In this case, it involves just you and God. God is the covenantor and you are the covenantee – you are the beneficiary of the deal. All you need then is a good understanding of what the covenant entails, you'll be up in abundance.' See p.24.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 25.

winter, and day and night shall not cease.’¹⁸⁸ He testifies that since he entered into the covenant of prosperity in March 1981, he entered into his rest.¹⁸⁹

Oyedepo explains that the covenant of sowing is simply becoming a *giver* and creative thinker; things must always work for such a person.¹⁹⁰ Giving, here, has to do with sowing, usually in monetary terms, into the ministry and into the life of the “man of God”. His style of teaching alone creates in the audience the readiness perform the leap of faith in giving to the ministry, and usually, the first point of giving has to do with the sale of his books, particularly, the one which captures the teachings for the day; and then the real offering follows.

Oyedepo’s prosperity, wealth and success gospel is worth looking at considering the fact that there are a number of his branch of denomination scattered across the regional capitals and towns of Ghana propagating the same message. His recorded series of video messages are also telecasted weekly on most television channels of the country. We need to also note most of the faith or prosperity gospel preachers have been influenced by ones the in the United States. Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal preachers have also had close link with the United States and Nigerian.

The Prosperity Theology: The Ghanaian Situation

The prosperity theology prevailing in Ghana is paradoxical and ambivalent in nature. There are such a great number of neo-Pentecostal adherents who are being greatly influenced by the faith or prosperity gospel from the United States and Nigeria. Such adherents do usually belong to the branches of foreign churches whose headquarters are either located in Nigeria or America. Others also received their training from these foreign Bible colleges who are noted for the prosperity teachings. An example is Duncan-Williams who was trained by Idahosa in Nigeria and who also has lots of networks in America, particularly, Bishop J. D. Jakes. The thrust of the prosperity gospel, in these cases, is the same as those presented above – prosperity, wealth, success and health are the evidential outcome of the faith of the *born again* believer. Duncan-Williams’ position on the prosperity is almost the same as that of Oyedepo. Gifford records that:

¹⁸⁸ Usually references are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

¹⁸⁹ Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 37.

He holds out himself as an example. He interprets Joshua 1: 8 in this way: ‘God implied that if Joshua would do these three things, success and prosperity would be guaranteed... What God told Joshua is what He told me. What worked for Joshua, has worked equally for me. It will produce the same result in your life if you follow His word’.¹⁹¹

Aside this, Gifford identifies three things that characterizes Ghana’s new Christianity, namely, success, wealth and status.¹⁹² These things are recurring emphases in most of all the activities or programmes and messages of the churches¹⁹³; this is the gospel of the kingdom of God – the well-being of whosoever subscribes to Christian call to salvation. And, as presented in the previous chapter, the foundational biblical reference for the take off of the prosperity – success, wealth, and health – gospel is the III John 2 which says: “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”¹⁹⁴ From this text, they identify three types of prosperity – material or financial prosperity, physical or health prosperity, and spiritual prosperity. They refer to Jesus as being an example of a prosperous leader for whose example they follow. This idea is loosely taken from the biblical story of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem in Luke 19: 28 – 40. The story is about Jesus sending some of his disciples to go and untie a colt when he was approaching the entrance of Jerusalem. He told them when anyone asked of the reason for untying the colt they should say *the Lord is in need of it*. The disciples brought the colt and cloths were cast on it and Jesus sat on it and entered Jerusalem.

Most of the prosperity gospel preachers hypothetically interpret the colt on which Jesus sat as being the same as the modern cars they use in doing the kingdom work. They argue that if Jesus was to be around in these times, he would use the expensive car for his business; expensive because, for them, the colt at the time of Jesus was an expensive means of transportation. So the modern cars they use today as pastors or bishops are signs of the blessings of the kingdom, and that not only did Jesus use expensive colt, he also wore expensive robes. In fact, Asamoah-

¹⁹¹ See Gifford, “Ghana’s Charismatic Churches”, p. 44.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Gifford further explains, and it is obvious today, that success, wealth and status mentality are usually displayed on car bumper stickers with inscriptions like “Unstoppable Achievers”, “I am a Winner”, “Jesus is a Winner Man”, “With Jesus I Will Always Win”, “I am a Child of the Covenant”, “I am More than A Conqueror”, “I Shall Be the Head and Not the Tail”, and the like. Also, on some other bumper stickers proclaim churches’ label for the current year, like “1999, My Year of Dominion”, “2000, My Year of Enlargement”, “My Time to Shine”, “My Year of Glory”, “My Year Divine Intervention”, and many others. I have also witnessed the recent stickers reading “My Year of Success”, “My Year of Financial Prosperity”, “My Year of Expansion” and so on. See Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, pp. 44 – 45.

¹⁹⁴ Reference is in NKJV.

Gyadu presents the neo-Pentecostal preachers' reflection of some of the above texts in the following words:

This message conforms to the general neo-Pentecostal belief that God wants his children to be happy, to eat the best food at the most expensive restaurants, to appear in best clothes, often designer made because, as Bishop Duncan-Williams claimed during a prime-time TV talk show in Accra, '*Jesus wore designer clothing*'. The donkey on which Jesus rode to Jerusalem is even considered by some to have been the most expensive means of transport of his day and people gambled for his robe because it was seamless and therefore designer made. In short God wants his children to have the best of everything.¹⁹⁵

Those who emphasis faith as a basic principle towards material prosperity, like all the other faith gospel preachers, do also point out the principle of sowing and reaping as a covenant that catapults into realm of full realization of wealth. These preachers are characterized by frequent and extreme demands for money from their adherents in the name of offering them the opportunity to sow seeds for abundant harvest. The extent to which they take money from their clients in the name of seed faith has blurred the whole phenomenon and suggested a foul play and a Christianity that breeds laziness rather than hard work. Gifford reports some of the ways by which giving is prioritize by some of the neo-Pentecostal preachers in the following words: 'James Saah, Duncan-Williams's deputy, spoke at ... convention on 'Economic Empowerment'. He stated: "The first key to kingdom prosperity is giving."¹⁹⁶

Notwithstanding Gifford's interesting point, couple of years ago, I attended what the Christian Action Ministries International refers to as "The Jericho Hour" which is a prayer meeting held on every Thursday in their sanctuary (popularly known as Prayer Cathedral). That day happened to be the birthday of Bishop James Saah, the leader of such special prayer service, and so in the course of the prayer, an announcement went out which asked the congregation to give gift offering to the bishop as a birthday gift, and to my surprise, sacks and huge bowls were used for that. One could imagine how much would be the total offering, of course, this is not mention to the congregation. The total amount of offerings taken, be it regular church offering or gifts for preachers, are mostly not made known to the congregation, in most cases, those gift offerings are not counted but handed over to the bishop in bags. This really brings us to the functioning of the neo-Pentecostal preachers and money. The paradox is the Ghanaian situation regarding the

¹⁹⁵ See Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, pp. 205 – 206.

¹⁹⁶ See Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, p. 64.

praxis of the prosperity gospel emphasizes both the principles of giving and the need to be diligence in business. Otabil, for instance, insists that faith must also result in putting one's hands to work, for God blesses the work of our hands.

THE PROSPERITY THEOLOGY IN CONTEXT: CONFIGURING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN GHANA

Despite the demerits associated with leaders or teachers of the prosperity theology, there exist the underlying factor that the prosperity gospel easily fits into the context of the traditional concept of the quest for the *well-being* of the individual and the community. In fact, a current research conduct in Nigeria, a close ally of Ghana in terms of Christianity, shows that 'Christ is more likely to be accepted where (in churches) prosperity gospel is preached is quite popular... that there is an organic connection between prosperity gospel and church growth'.¹⁹⁷ The question is whether the majority of Ghanaian Christians will subscribe to the prosperity gospel. The unprecedented rate of proliferation of these churches show in an affirmative way that most Christians feel comfortable with the phenomenon, but quite a number is also displeased about the way and manner the exponents of the prosperity gospel carry themselves about in a pompous way.

Africans, generally, believe in the practical result of religion. Thus, one will move from one shrine to another in search solution to a problem. Religion is potent and evidential – it yields desired result. Such mentality is transported into Christianity, and any pastor who does not challenge the adherents to act in faith and expect results is considered less powerful. The traditional practice is that when you go to the shrine you are told to bring certain things for sacrifice or rituals to evoke divine response. In the same vein, these pastors make demands in the form of money in order to assure their clients of a miracle of abundance or healing. Giving is fundamental in African traditional religion. This is captured in a saying that *Se ɔkɔbram ye adze a wɔman no mbo*, meaning *whoever does something good for you deserves an appreciation*. The priestesses and priests who cure various illness of the people are usually appreciated after one

¹⁹⁷ See Godwin I. Akper, 'Prosperity Gospel: A Case Study of Benue State in North-Central Nigeria', in *Journal of Reformed Theology*1 (2007), p. 48.

totally healed or the problem is solved. What are some of the practical significance of the prosperity teaching in Ghana and Africa as a whole?

Self Motivation of Adherents Rise above Reproach

One of the merits of the faith or prosperity theology is the ability to challenge those with low esteemed image to respond to the 'I can do spirit' which psychologically serves as a motivating factor for the vulnerable to do something positive about their situation. Indeed, there individuals who, as result of the prosperity teachings, have been able to attain success and prosperity. Other individuals have been motivated to take up entrepreneurial ventures and they are succeeding.

Rising of Acts and Actors who Creates Space for the Vulnerable

The prosperity gospel, in the Ghanaian context, is causing individuals to perform leap of faith in responding to societal needs such as orphanages and homes for street children which the government is unable to address for lack of resources. By faith, such individuals see aiding of orphans and caring for street children as divine calling and a way of sowing into peoples' life for both material and eternal rewards. Faith here has to do with the breaking of the persisting and prevailing norms in order to bring a tremendous visible and positive change of situation; this is a creative faith, a 'stirrings of the soul are usually the product of a creative emotion that is organized by an aspiration towards openness, an openness towards movement and change that provokes us to dispense with habitual modes of thinking and to embrace profoundly new insights and ideas.'¹⁹⁸

Development Projects as Christian Socio-economic Responsibility to the Society

It is worth noting that some of these prosperity preachers have also undertaken some developmental projects like establishment of schools, vocational training centers, and

¹⁹⁸ See Melanie White, 'Can an Act of Citizenship be Creative?', Engin F. Isin & Greg M. Nielsen, eds, *Acts of Citizenship* (London: Zed Books, 2008), p. 52.

universities. At the time when Ghana's public universities could not absorb the total number of students who were qualified for an enrolment, some of the neo-Pentecostal churches founded private universities to meet the needs of those who could not access to them.

THE NEO-PENTECOSTAL PREACHERS AND MATERIAL PROSPERITY

Indeed the lifestyle of most of the neo-Pentecostal preachers, particularly those with relatively large congregations, in Ghana and in other countries of Africa is revealing. They are not approachable by the public, very expensive in all appearance – cars and dressing, authoritative and compelling. I shall very much describe them as *lovers of money and pleasure*. Franklin are worth noting in this context:

I refer to the clergy who operate from this orientation as “spiritual entrepreneurs” who know how to produce, package, market, and distribute user-friendly spirituality for the masses. The spiritual product lines they market rarely make stringent ethical demands upon their listeners. Instead, they proffer a gospel of health, wealth, and success designed to help others become more affluent. When these leaders serve as pastors of congregations, they function like “entrepreneurial ecclesiastical executives” at the helm of corporate organizations. Such congregations and leaders may be changing who they are and are called to be, distorting the meaning of church as a community of holy awareness, care, interdependence, and action.¹⁹⁹

It is worth noting that most of the criticisms, especially the negative ones, leveled against the whole notion of the prosperity gospel can be attributed to attitudes of the leaders of the churches. The ways by which these leaders propagate the prosperity gospel and emphasize the giving aspect as an indispensable factor to material prosperity and their lifestyle of consumerism cause the public, especially the vigilant ones, to cast doubt on all their operations. Indeed, most of these preachers live a life of avarice and spend the income of the church for personal ventures like purchasing new cars, modern ones, putting up huge mansions and would like to show off in public. Asamoah-Gyadu comments on the lifestyles of the prosperity exponents as follows:

The lifestyles of founders, pastors and leaders of the various CMs are the most cogent reflections of the philosophy that informs the message of prosperity. The leaders embody the fruits of prosperity as testament to the integrity and efficacy of the type of gospel message they advocate. In defence, of his own

¹⁹⁹ See Robert M. Franklin, ‘The Gospel of Bling’, p. 22.

extravagant lifestyle, Jim Bakker, the ‘converted apostle’ of prosperity theology, is quoted as saying that a pastor should be as wealthy as the wealthiest member of the congregation. This thought is also present in Ghana’s Duncan-Williams, who teaches that the days when church members drove the best cars whilst their pastors struggled on foot are over. Charismatic church leaders therefore present themselves and are so seen as the benchmark of God’s prosperity.²⁰⁰

The following represent some of the negative representation of the prosperity gospel due to the unwholesome attitudes of the exponents:

Overemphasis and manipulation of the biblical principle of sowing and reaping (Giving) for personal aggrandizement:

Indeed, most leaders of the neo-Pentecostal churches who also noted for the propagation of the prosperity gospel do live flamboyant lifestyles. During the period of his research in the late 1990s, Asamoah-Gyadu described their glaring lifestyles in the following words:

Ghanaian pastors of the CMs carry mobile phones, put on tuxedos or three-piece traditional *agbada* to preach. The drive Mercedes-Benz cars or others in that price range, often a gift from a member, or as it is usually expressed ‘a seed sown in the life of the man / woman of God’, obviously in anticipation of the sower’s own blessing. Many pastors openly allude to their worldwide peregrinations, travelling first class... A number of CM pastors are also known to be owners of very luxurious accommodation situated in expensive residential areas in Ghana.²⁰¹

Of course, in the time of Asamoah-Gyadu, the things mentioned were particularly seen with rich in the society. It was rare to see a poor man with mobile phone or driving but the pastors were using them. Today, the same pastors are identified with current models of the cars, mobiles, dresses, and the like. Recently, one popular so-called prophet was interviewed on radio concerning his properties and this is his response:

It is true I have good cars because you do not expect me to walk on foot to do God’s work, so as for cars I have got a lot of them; and very good ones of course. No one gets a good car and says he does not like it. I do not have a Hummer; I have never owned one. I have two Chryslers, about two of the latest models and other different types of good cars. It is also true I own a radio station. “I bought Radio Mercury in Kumasi

²⁰⁰ See Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, p. 208. The CMs represent Charismatic Churches which also described as the Neo-Pentecostal churches in this study.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp. 208 – 9.

to do God's work; I bought the station, the entire building and the land on which the building is situated and paid cash for it. So I am not rich but very blessed by God and I do not lack any good thing.²⁰²

I recall in my field interviews, one of the respondents said that out of about ten churches on a Sunday, about eight raise funds for infrastructure and welfare of pastors. He alluded to the fact that these pastors justify their demand or claim of money with story of the widow of Zarephath who fed the prophet with her last meal and the prophet prayed for her abundance (1 Kings 17: 7 – 16).²⁰³ There is overwhelming emphasis on money in most of these churches; almost every sermon has to close with a kind of fund raising or offering. Gifford refers to Dag Heward-Mills²⁰⁴ *Unbeatable Prosperity*, a book which was dedicated to the Millionaires Club of Lighthouse Chapel International, a popular neo-Pentecostal church in almost every city of Ghana, who argues that prosperity is earned by divine provision; that there are four laws governing divine provision and these laws are: tithe; offering; 'seeking the kingdom (spiritually by prayer, or physically by "using your money to construct chapels and other buildings for the glory of God")'; and by "financing , missions and ministers".²⁰⁵ He added that "Anytime you minister personally to a man of God you invoke the laws of divine provision."²⁰⁶ This is much like saying that the four laws of divine provision are giving, giving, giving, and the last is giving.

Too much emphasis on giving rather than other aspects of the gospel of the kingdom leads to manipulation of both the rich and the poor in these churches. The gestures of the said leaders suggest a hidden transcript, and that is to use the vulnerable situation of the poor for personal gain. 'They pressurize the congregation in order to gain things for themselves and the result is that "they end up committing blunders".'²⁰⁷ I agree with Asamoah-Gyadu that the issue here is not that driving a new car or using modern things are signs of extravagancy but that these pastors consider the possession of these things as 'indices of God's blessing for Christian faithfulness.'²⁰⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu further argues that:

²⁰² Robert J, a journalist, "Richest Pastors in Ghana": <http://articles.ghananation.com/41/3174-ebenezer-adarkwa-yiadom.html> - Assessed on 19 March 2013.

²⁰³ A personal interview with Kingsley Ofosu-Ntiamoah of Koforidua.

²⁰⁴ Dag Heward-Mills is the bishop of the Lighthouse International Chapel which also owns one of the biggest sanctuary in the regional capital of Ghana, Accra, known *Qodesh*.

²⁰⁵ See Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, p. 152.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁰⁷ See Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, p. 209.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 210.

This throws into question the basis on which biblical figures listed in Hebrews 11 are considered people of faith. The materialistic lifestyle of Ghana's Charismatic pastors is the source of much criticism from the public because it stands in sharp contrast to the traditional Ghanaian image of a man or woman of God. The pastors of traditional mission churches are uniformed, often very poorly remunerated, and generally expected to display a very modest lifestyle. The same goes for pastors of classical Pentecostal churches.²⁰⁹

Again, Asamoah-Gyadu's description portrays rather the opposite in that the neo-Pentecostal prosperity theology have had enormous influence on almost all pastors of various denominations – both mainline churches and classical Pentecostal churches. Every pastor in Ghana today seems to aim at becoming a celebrity in the future. The problem is that these pastors manipulate or skillfully change the biblical meaning of giving to suit their purpose or for their advantage.²¹⁰ 'Selected "proof-texts" from the Bible are interpreted to mean that God wills all believers to prosper in *this* life.'²¹¹ For example, III John 2, which is used as the basis for the prosperity gospel, basically is a greeting from the author to the audience and not just for someone to build a whole theological doctrine on it.

Abuse of the Vulnerability of the Poor:

The poor here simply refers to anyone has chronic or cycle economic or financial lacks as well as the physically unhealthy or sick people. Many of these people, due to their situation, have developed an insatiable quest for wealth or prosperity and good health, and will go every mile to obtain it. When such people find themselves in these prosperity promised churches they tend to put their faith in the exponents of the prosperity gospel and hang on in obedience to them in return for the forth coming blessing of wealth and health. Do they usually receive the expected prosperity? Well, some adherents would claim they do receive the promised breakthroughs by faith after acting in accordance with word and sowing the seed; but then, I have also realized that

²⁰⁹ See Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, p. 210.

²¹⁰ The meaning of the term *manipulate* is taken from Dictionary.com:

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/manipulate?s=t> – (Assessed on 19 March 2013).

²¹¹ See Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, p. 215. According to Asamoah-Gyadu, "proof-texting" refers to the practice of using selected biblical verses to support arguments, regardless of the context. These selected texts are then taken as sufficient proof of God's mind and purpose on particular issues. In this way whole sermons could be built around single words or phrases within biblical passages, for example, the use of "enlarge" in the story of Jabez. Because of its subjective and arbitrary approach to biblical interpretation, "proof-texting" leads to truncated, if not erroneous, views on theological issues.'

most people have been giving to these churches in return for wealth and health but have never receive any of it; the poor get poorer every time and the pastor (who used to be poor) gets richer.

Why, because in their desperate situation of need, the poor / the sick or the vulnerable mostly shall be prepared to act in obedience to the instructions of the supposed cure of the problem. That is, if she/he is told to sow seed money for a supernatural turnover or turning point in their lives, they will do it. The media and the general public is not unaware of the various exploitations and fraud of some the prosperity gospel preachers.

Abuse Church Funds:

Most of the leaders of the neo-Pentecostal churches who do not have the vision of the addressing the socio-economic needs of the people, especially, the poor among them, tend to use the church funds for personal interest – buying of new cars, new dresses, and the like. These are the pastors whose deeds are placed on the media for public scrutiny. Some of the churches even do not have any form of internal and external auditors to ensure fair accountability even to the members of their denominations. Here, the pastors are said to have been digging their hands into the church coffers at any time they want.

CONCLUSION

The prosperity theology purports to be good news to the poverty situation of most African countries. Here Jesus is seen as the provider of wealth and success. The preachers advance the notion that faith in God's word, confession of it and seed faith will definitely be reward with material prosperity. The preachers, through such teachings, have rather amassed wealth to the detriment of the poor. Whereas some have been able to use the amassed wealth to set up developmental projects like schools and universities, others are abusing and lavishing it on themselves, thus being seen in the eyes of the public as greedy pastors. If the prosperity gospel is well embraced in Africa, which seems to be the case, then can we accept it as contextual phenomenon? Is there a relationship between the prosperity gospel and the gospel of the

kingdom of God? What then is this gospel of the kingdom of God? The following chapter explores comprehensive view on the meaning of the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching.

Chapter 6

THY KINGDOM COME:

THE CONCEPT AND THE PRAXIS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN GHANA'S NEW CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we discussed what is popularly known as the prosperity gospel or faith gospel which some theologians as well as the clergy consider to be corruption and deviation from the *actual* gospel – the gospel of the kingdom of God. The notion of the ‘kingdom’ in a Ghanaian as well as African context serves as the backdrop to the way and manner the introduction of Christianity – the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God – in the continent was received, perceived and practiced. Basically, “kingdoms” also associated with “empires” had to do with the use and abuse of power in all forms; oppression, suppression, and possession of a people and property were identified with it. And so the hearing of the coming another “kingdom” evoked fear and threats on the subjects (the majority) and rulers (minority) as well. The Christian announcement “*Repent, for the kingdom God is here*” was initially construed as an invasion of another empire, which actually is the case with the era of colonialism in Africa, and therefore received as an oppressive religion with an extreme opposition in some cases.²¹² In the post-colonial Africa, Christianity, particularly the Pentecostal denomination, is said to be the fastest prolific religion.²¹³ Pentecostal Christianity can be seen, in today’s world evangelicalism, as the heralds of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

²¹² Paul Gifford has argued that, beside the positive effects of colonialism in Africa, it also left negative legacies. That, ‘Colonial administrations were both centralized and authoritarian. Just as important, the rulers manifested a sense of superiority over those they ruled, and power was experienced as coming from above rather than flowing from below. Thus, the ruled developed a sense of the state as an alien institution, to be feared but also to be deceived and exploited, since it existed on a plane above the people whom it governed, beyond any chance of control.’ *African Christianity: Its Public Life*, p. 3.

²¹³ Asamoah-Gyadu’s research was motivated with ‘a desire to illustrate an aspect of the nature and manifestation of the shifting centre of gravity of Christianity in the twentieth century from the North to the South.’ And that ‘Pentecostal Christianity, the religion of the Holy Spirit... represents the most concrete evidence of the phenomenal expansion of Christianity in African countries like Ghana.’ *African Charismatics*, p. ix (preface). Also,

In this chapter I will be focusing on what is said to be the centrality of Jesus' gospel of the kingdom of God in both post-colonial and critical African theological perspectives. The chapter presents a comprehensive view of Jesus' kingdom of God, particularly, in relation to the poor in the gospels and in the present times. In doing this, I will look at the understanding of the term "kingdom" in African context; the reception of the kingdom preached by the colonialists; the kingdom of God verses the political kingdom of Ghana (Nkrumah's political priority); Post-colonial perspectives of the kingdom of God; Characteristics of the kingdom; the poor as the main object of Jesus' kingdom of God; and the challenge to Christians in Ghana.

"KINGDOM" AFRICAN IN CONTEXT

The term "kingdom", *ahendi* in my context as an Akan, means the reign or rule of the king or the chief. The whole notion suggests, the turn of the display of the power of a new ruler (king or chief) over a people within a geographical location; and here, the focus of the whole society is on the leader and how he or she would make it happen in terms of providing for the people and defend them against encroachers. In the pre-colonial Africa and as indicated in the second chapter, "nations" were popularly known by kingdoms or empires (that is, kings and their conquered territories) as in other parts of the world. So, the word "kingdom" also evoked the acts of conquering and being conquered, and also, insecurity and fear in the subjects. The kingdom, in reality, favored the elite (the king's family and elders) who were always seen at the top of the ladder and in most cases were given the best protection as against the subjects from whom fighters or soldiers were made.

The pre-colonial Ghana was made up of kingdoms that fought against each other in order to expand their territories and power. Here, the kings or chiefs enjoyed solidarity from the people because they basically ensured redistribution of the produce of the land to everyone, both the weak and the strong. Good leadership here was marked by the extent to which redistribution was carried out to the ruled. For instance, a typical clan leader of the Akans, *ebusiapanyin*, had the main function of ensuring peace and tranquility in terms of fair distribution of the *ebusia asaase*, family land or *ebusia egyapaadze*, family property, among others. Why land? This was because

see Cephas N. Omenyo, 'Essential Aspects of African Ecclesiology: The Case of the African Independent Churches', in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Vol. 22, Number 2, Fall 2000, p. 231.

land, at that time, was the basic resource and means of sustenance for the society; apart from using it basically for agricultural purposes, precious minerals (gold, bauxite, etc) are hidden in most African soils; livelihood depended on it. The more land a particular kingdom or ruler conquered, occupied and ruled, the more powerful and rich they were.

Notwithstanding the power struggle that existed in the pre-colonial period, we need to note that fact that, during this era, the local chiefs and elders of various communities and families had the basic responsibility for redistribution of the produce of the land. In this case, the ruled or subjects followed the ruler without a sense of fear but with a sense of communalism and solidarity. What went wrong? I have already noted in chapter two of this thesis that the advent of colonialism with its Trans-Atlantic slave trade brought about exploitation and impoverishment of most countries of Africa and in this case Ghana. Christianity which was introduced at this time was seen as an oppressive religion, an *anti-kingdom* phenomenon.

Colonialism and Christianity: Reception of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

In chapter two, I have argued earlier that the initial introduction of Christianity into the countries of Africa like Ghana met an opposition because of its then colonial bedmate. Christianity was perceived as an invasion religion which destroyed the indigenous rich religious culture and values condemning them as outmoded, primitive, pagan, heathen, and barbaric.²¹⁴ Christianity was defined in terms of the slave trade and exploitations of Africans by colonialism. In fact, John S. Pobee²¹⁵, in the prolegomena to his book, argues that:

Christianity as it reached Africa south of the Sahara came via Europe and in recent times America. This observation is important because, since European powers like Britain, France, and Germany came to be colonial powers on the African continent, Christianity has often been charged with being an instrument employed by the European colonial powers to enslave and oppress the Africans.²¹⁶

Pobee refers to the words of the late Kwame Nkrumah, ‘the prince of African politics and nationalism in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century’:

²¹⁴ See Amanor, “Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African Reformation”

²¹⁵ John S. Pobee is a Canon of the Anglican Church, Ghana and a Professor Emeritus of the Department of the Study of Religion, University of Ghana, Legon.

²¹⁶ See John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p. 15.

The stage opens with the appearance of missionaries and anthropologists, traders and concessionaires, administrators. While the “missionaries” with “Christianity” implore the colonial subject to lay up his “treasures in Heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt,” the traders and concessionaires and administrators acquire his mineral and land resources, destroy his arts, crafts and home industries.²¹⁷

And, according to him, ‘Christianity has been instrumental in the enslavement of *homo Africanus*.’²¹⁸ Pobee refers to *Ghana Evening News* of March 26, 1960 which ‘carried a cartoon in which a bishop with a Bible in one hand hugged an expatriate soldier, with gun in hand, who had shot dead an African’²¹⁹ and the cartoon had the caption: “Watch the Bible and not my action.”²²⁰ He further says that the cartoon ‘expresses the allegation often made against the Christian church, namely that the church is an *imperialist agent*; that the colonial powers were consciously aided by the Christian missionary churches in the enslavement and suppression of Africans.’²²¹ Now such colonial political atrocities, carried out in collaboration with the Christian missionary churches, painted a negative picture and perception of the so-called coming *kingdom* of God which eventually also led to the initial resistance of the gospel in some African countries and communities. It was against this background that Nkrumah, in the struggle for independence from the colonial rule, urged the people of Ghana to view the seeking of the political kingdom of the country as the priority over the Christian kingdom – the kingdom of God.²²²

And so, for Christianity to gain root in Africa, it had to be contextualized or re-interpreted to suit African people. The coming kingdom of God preached by Christ Jesus has to be understood not as a violent political invasion of cultures and religions of the people but as that which brings about liberation of the oppressed from the oppressors and relief to the suffering poor; that which promises good health, wealth and prosperity instead of infliction of pain, exploitation and enslavement of the majority. To this, Pobee relates that ‘if there is to be a serious and deep communication and rooting of the gospel of Christ, the African stamp will have to replace the

²¹⁷ See John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, pp. 15 – 16. Pobee quoted these words from Marcus Garvey, *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Amy Jacques Garvey, ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 44.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 16.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²²⁰ *Ibid*.

²²¹ *Ibid*.

²²² See Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana*, p. 146.

European stamp.²²³ That, ‘there is the need to translate Christianity into genuine African categories.’²²⁴ This is what Pobee calls African Theology.²²⁵

It was within almost the same imperialistic context of both the European and Western world that the gospel of Jesus Christ was propagated in Africa, no wonder it met so much opposition. Africans, on the contrary, opposed the corrupt socio-political and colonial means of propagating the gospel and not the gospel itself. This is proven so in the contextualization and inculturation of the gospel which has yielded prolific results in most African countries of which Ghana stands out.²²⁶ This is also due to the fact that a careful examination of the content of Jesus’ kingdom message seems to favor the poor – the marginalized and the oppressed in society. In view of this, I deem it fit to take a look at a comprehensive view of Jesus’ kingdom of God from critical African theological and post-colonial perspectives.

POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE OF JESUS’ KINGDOM OF GOD

Some other scholars, from post-colonial theological perspectives, have related Jesus and the kingdom of God to our modern day society. Richard A. Horsley, for example, discusses the Jesus and the kingdom of God from a liberal and religious background and an American context. Seeing United States as a new Roman Empire, Horsley through a relational approach focuses on ‘how Jesus responded to the Roman imperial order, or from the point of view of his Galilean and Judean contemporaries, the disorder that Roman imperialism meant for their lives.’²²⁷ He

²²³ See Pobee, *Towards an African Theology*, p. 17.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 17 – 18.

²²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 18.

²²⁶ Marcus Garvey of Ethiopia is claimed to have said that: “If the white man has the idea of a white God, let him worship his God as he desires. If the yellow man’s God is of his race let him worship his God as he sees fit. We, as Negroes, have found a new idea. Whilst our God has no color, yet it is human to see everything through one’s own spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through white spectacle, we have only now started out (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles. The God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, let him exist for the race that believes in the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, the one God of all ages. That is the God in whom we believe, but we shall worship Him through the spectacles of Ethiopia.” See Pobee, *Towards an African Theology*, pp. 16 – 17. It is due to regard that Pobee, as already indicated in the chapter, further argues that ‘in view of the rising political pressures like African nationalism and in order that the gospel may have real encounter with *homo Africanus*, there is the need to translate Christianity into genuine African categories.’ Pobee, pp. 17 – 18.

²²⁷ See Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 13

therefore deems the understanding of ‘how Roman imperialism determined the conditions of life in Galilee and Jerusalem’ – the context of Jesus – as necessary precedence for any attempt to comprehend the words and actions of Jesus.²²⁸ The kingdom of God, as such, cannot be understood without one’s political and social context. Jesus, through the message of the kingdom of God, addresses the prevailing disorders of our societies and communities. Jesus preached the message of the near and arrived kingdom of God in the context of Roman imperialism – a context which brought about elitism who amassed wealth through occupation of lands and working of slaves from different parts of the world.²²⁹ And to avoid revolt from within their communities by the majority poor, they decided to provide abundant food for their citizens though the labour of the ‘imported tens of thousands of slaves taken in the wars of conquest to work the land.’²³⁰ Horsley further writes:

The expansion of Rome to over a million – a huge population for an ancient – compounded the flow of resources from conquered peoples and provinces to the imperial metropolis. In the interest of public order (and preserving their own positions of honor, privilege, and power) the emperors and Roman elite had to provide the populace with adequate food, along with public entertainment – the “bread and circus” made famous by the satirist Juvenal... At the most fundamental level, the imperial system had to supply the urban masses of Rome (and other metropolises) with food.²³¹

The Romans took pleasure in subjugating peoples through ‘crucifixion, mass slaughter and enslavement, massacres of whole towns and annihilation of whole peoples’ as the means to let order prevail in their world.²³² It was in this kind of society that Jesus emerged with his kingdom message and was eventually considered to be a revolt against public order. Horsley relates that ‘By common consensus Jesus proclaimed the imminence or presence of the kingdom of God. If we look at the early Gospels as whole stories, and not simply at the sayings, then Jesus

²²⁸ See Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, p. 13. He stresses this notion with illustrations: (1) Trying to understand Jesus’ speech and action without knowing how Roman imperialism that decisively determined the conditions of life in Galilee and Jerusalem would be like trying to understand Martin Luther King without knowing how slavery, reconstruction, and segregation determined the lives of African Americans in the United States.’ (2) ‘Trying to understand Jesus’ mission without a sense of the frequent and intense resistance to the “new world order” among Galileans and Judeans would be like trying to understand a contemporary Islamic renewal movement in the Middle East without a sense of the widespread discontent and a variety of movements, including terrorist organizations.’ See pp. 13 – 14.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 24 – 25.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 25.

²³¹ *Ibid*, p. 25. Apart from the slaves’ food production of the land, Rome also extracted resources from subject peoples through levies and extreme taxes.

²³² *Ibid*, p. 27.

was also practicing or implementing the kingdom of God in healings, exorcisms, feedings, and covenantal teachings.²³³ Jon Sobrino,²³⁴ from Latin American context, ascribes two connotations to the kingdom of God in the Old Testament (OT), namely, ‘that God rules in his acts, and that ‘it exists in order to transform a bad and unjust historical-social reality into a different good and just one.’²³⁵ He thinks the appropriate wording of the “kingdom” of God should be the “reign” of God, the reason being that the “reign” of God ‘is then the positive action through which God transforms reality and God’s “kingdom” is what comes to pass in this world when God truly reigns: a history, a society, a people transformed according to the will of God.’²³⁶ He further views three aspects of the reign of God: (1) The reign of God’s vivid influence on human history²³⁷; (2) God’s actions impress on the change of the whole of society, the whole of a people²³⁸; and (3) God’s kingdom emerges as good news within bad society who are anti-kingdom.²³⁹ His summary on the OT understanding of the Kingdom of God is worth noting:

[The] Kingdom of God is a utopia that answers the age-old hope of a people in the midst of historical calamities; it is, then, what is good and wholly good. But it is also something liberating, since it arrives in the midst of and in opposition to the oppression of the anti-Kingdom. It needs and generates a hope that is also liberating from the understandable despair built up in history from the evidence that what triumphs in history is the anti-Kingdom.²⁴⁰

Writing from a context which is not much different from the context of most African countries, like Ghana, - a context of historical suffering and oppression inflicted by colonialism and imperialism, Sobrino emphasize the liberation the Kingdom of God brings to the oppressed and at the same time serves as a victorious opposition to perpetrators of oppression and suffering, the

²³³ See Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, p. 14.

²³⁴ Jon Sobrino a Spanish-born Jesuit theologian who is well known because of immense contributions to Liberation Theology.

²³⁵ See Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 71.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 71.

²³⁷ This simply means that the ‘Kingdom of God corresponds to a *hope in history*.’ *Ibid*.

²³⁸ Here, Sobrino alludes to the fact that ‘Our response to the Kingdom of God, then, has to be not just hope, but *hope as a people*, of a whole people and for a whole people.’ *Ibid*, p. 72.

²³⁹ ‘The kingdom of God will not arrive, so to speak, from a *tabula rasa*, but from and against the anti-Kingdom that is formally and actively opposed to it. The Kingdom of God is, then, a dialectical and conflictual reality, excluding and opposing the anti-Kingdom. Our response to the Kingdom of God has to be, therefore, in no way an ingenuous hope, but hoping against hope – in the late Pauline expression of Romans 4: 18 – and an *active and fighting* hope against the anti-Kingdom.’ *Ibid*.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

anti-Kingdom. Here, the kingdom of God is not to be seen as political power but liberating good news to the oppressed. As noted, Sobrino's context resonates that of mine – Ghanaian and African context where the kingdom of God is received as a hope to the hopeless and good news to the poor. Let us examine some characteristics of Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

It has to be noted here that defining Jesus' Kingdom of God in simple statements shall not offer us a holistic picture of what the whole phenomenon was and is about. The nature of the Jesus' kingdom of God is spiritual but its deeds are socio-politically directed towards the liberation of the marginalized, the majority ruled, in society. 'The conception of the Kingdom of God (or in Mt. the "Kingdom of Heaven") is a central element in the teaching of Jesus Christ and has formed the core of attempts to reconstruct what He taught.'²⁴¹ Before we begin to go into the subject of characteristics, it is important to briefly examine the OT background of the kingdom of God.

What are the content and the purpose of this kingdom of God? Many theologians or biblical scholars have had discourses about the kingdom of God from diverse perspectives and contexts. From the OT perspective, the term *kingdom* means God's royal rule or dominion.²⁴² G. R. Beasley-Murray²⁴³ claims that the primary meaning of the term *kingdom* is 'authority and power of a king, not the country ruled or the people ruled by a king' and so he defines it as 'the lawful exercise of royal power, as over against tyranny, the unjust use of such authority.'²⁴⁴ So, here, the term *kingdom* refers to a king's or a leader's ability to defend the defenseless and the weak

²⁴¹ See F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 930. Also, see Wilhelm Pratscher, "Kingdom of God: NT", in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* Vol. 3 (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2003), pp. 125 – 127; and B. T. Viviano, "Kingdom of God", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Gale, 2003), pp. 172 - 175.

²⁴² See Hermann Spieckermann, "Kingdom of God: OT", in *Encyclopedia of Christianity* Vol. 3 (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2003), pp. 123 – 124. He argues that, for most theological usages in the OT, 'they refer to earthly kingdoms and empires, whether Israelite, Babylonian, or Persian. There is certainly unanimity that God gives and takes away earthly dominion...'

²⁴³ G. R. Beasley-Murray, from England, was a conservative Baptist Christian and theologian.

²⁴⁴ See G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35/1 (March 1992) 19 – 30: http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/35/35-1/JETS_35-1_019-030_Beasley-Murray.pdf - (Accessed on 1 April 2013). He also sees this definition as being consonance with the biblical meaning of the kingdom.

against any form of invasion of an anti-kingdom. Beasley-Murray argues that, in Jesus' teaching as well in the whole of the New Testament (NT), 'the kingdom of God has specific reference to the fulfillment of the promises of God in the OT of the time when God puts forth his royal power to end injustice and oppression by this world's evil powers and to establish his rule of righteousness, peace and joy for humanity – in a world, to fulfill his purpose in creating the world.'²⁴⁵ G. H. Gilbert, in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, also relates that Jesus' reference in the Gospel of Mark (1: 15) which reads that "'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand,'" shows clearly His consciousness of being in the prophetic line, a continuator of the prophetic hope of a divine Kingdom', even though his words seem to mean more of a spiritual kingdom.²⁴⁶

Similarly, Martin J. Selman²⁴⁷, also sees the kingdom of God 'as a comprehensive Old Testament scheme, and the teaching of Jesus as a genuine and natural development of it.'²⁴⁸ It is of no doubt that the notion of the kingdom of God is rooted in the OT, and that, in Jesus' ministry as well as whole the NT, one can argue that it is the tangible manifestation of God's intention to liberate the poor and the oppressed from the oppressors of this world.

The question I will like to pose is that, if the Jesus' Kingdom of God is really not a political kingdom in worldly terms – the kingdoms of this earth -, then where should we place it? I am raising this question here because, from the above discussions, the Kingdom of God by words appear political; and the urgency of it portrays Jesus as one who confronted the political powers of the time. Horsley, for instance, sees Jesus' 'kingdom of God as judgment of the rulers' and also a renewal of Israel. Seeing two sides of it, he asserts:

The kingdom of God is somewhat analogous to the bipartite agenda of recent and current anti-colonial (anti-imperial) movements in which the withdrawal (or defeat) of the colonizing power is the counterpart

²⁴⁵ See G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus', p. 19.

²⁴⁶ See G. H. Gilbert, "The Kingdom of God", James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* Vol. VII (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1967), p. 736.

²⁴⁷ Martin J. Selman is a London based Old Testament Scholar.

²⁴⁸ See Martin J. Selman, 'The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament', *Tyndale Bulletin* 40.2 (1989), p. 162: http://www.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/library/TynBull_1989B_40_01_Selman_KingdomOfGodInOT.pdf - (Accessed on 1 April 2013).

and condition of the colonized people's restoration to independence and self-determination... Jesus as prophet proclaimed God's condemnation of rulers for political-economic oppression of the people.²⁴⁹

The urgency with which Jesus carried his kingdom message across has attracted theologians to interpret him as a political figure but his deeds – actions – seem to present him as otherwise. He might have appeared so confrontational in speech but was very meek by every action, as the Prophet Isaiah puts it,

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. *A bruise reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench*; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged. Till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait.²⁵⁰

Daniel J. Harrington's commentary (of the Gospel of Matthew) on the above text indicates that this is a 'the emphasis of the Servant Song in Isaiah 42:1-4 is the meekness and gentleness of the Servant, not suffering.'²⁵¹ The urgency of the kingdom can be attributed to the sense in which God had seen the oppression and heard the cry of his people and had to attend to them.²⁵² Words are sometimes very persuasive and so by these words of Jesus – the good news of the kingdom of God – the desire for God's freedom from oppression could be imprinted on the partakers' hearts and mind.

The kingdom of God, as a matter of fact, is not just the pivot of Jesus' message but the priority of his mission on earth and should be the priority every follower of his mission. This indicated in the Lord's Prayer: 'So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. *Your Kingdom come*. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." (Luke 11: 2).' Contextually, one would concur that, Jesus, having been confronted with the situation of the oppressed and the attitudes of the then oppressors, saw the urgency, the dying need, of the

²⁴⁹ See Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, p. 14.

²⁵⁰ See Matthew 12: 18 – 21 and Isaiah 42: 1 – 4, New King James Version (NKJV), *Emphasis are mine*.

²⁵¹ See Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Sacra Pagina Series Vol. 1* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 180 .

²⁵² Compare to Moses' encounter with God – the burning bush – where God said "I have seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey... Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them." See Exodus 3 : 7 – 9 (NKJV)

coming of the Kingdom of God, “*The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is hand. Repent, believe in the gospel*” (Mark 1: 15). John Fuellenbach explains that, from the text, ‘Mark wants to indicate that with Jesus the time has come to an end and the kingdom has broken into history.’²⁵³ Also, the Lord’s prayer impresses on the disciples the burden and the desire for the prevalence of the Kingdom on earth.

The urgency of Jesus’ Kingdom of God is also seen in the readiness and the imminence of its coming. In Luke’s gospel, when the Pharisees asked about the due time for the kingdom, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ... For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you,”²⁵⁴ or some theologians prefer the translation of the later to “the kingdom of God is among you.” The gospel according to Mathew puts it this way: ‘Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is truly plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”’²⁵⁵ Here, the readiness of the harvest calls for more workers – laborers – call them kingdom partners who will ensure the recruitment of others into the kingdom thereby bringing about expansion of it. Thus, the ‘coming Kingdom of God demands a conversion, *metanoia*, which ... is a task for the listener: the hope the poor must come to feel, the radical change of conduct required of the oppressors, the demands made on all to live a life worthy of the Kingdom.’²⁵⁶

The term *mission* is from the Latin origin *missiō* meaning a sending off. World English dictionary, among others, defines mission as ‘a specific task or duty assigned to a person or group of people.’²⁵⁷ In this context, the kingdom of God is the task for which God sent Jesus into this world. Jesus’ mission also entails the content of the message of the kingdom of God. It

²⁵³ See John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 80.

²⁵⁴ See Luke 17: 21 – 22 (NKJV). Luke Timothy Johnson comments that the statement *the kingdom of God is within you* ‘saying is unique to Luke and has been interpreted in several way. The critical problem is the understanding of *entos hymōn*. Some read this as “within you” as though the rule of God were a spiritual awareness. This fits the sense of the Greek adverb ... but it does not do as well with the plural pronoun “you,” or the narrative context of Luke, in which such a statement to the Pharisees would be unthinkable. The present translation follows the majority opinion that the adverb *entos* with the plural pronoun should have the sense of “among you.” This makes good sense of the narrative context: Jesus tells the Pharisees that the kingdom is forming around the prophet even in their midst, yet they cannot see it for what it is.’ *The Gospel of Luke: Sacra Pagina Series Vol. 3* (Collegeville Minnesota: The Liturgical Books, 1991), Daniel J. Harrington, ed., p. 263.

²⁵⁵ See Mathew 9: 37 – 38 (NKJV).

²⁵⁶ See Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, pp. 76 – 77.

²⁵⁷ See World English Dictionary, “Mission”: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mission?s=t> – (Accessed on 7 April 2013).

should be also noted that the main feature of Jesus kingdom of God is the fact that it was and is for the poor, the marginalized in society. Jesus' mission, therefore, should be seen in terms of his involvement with the liberation of the poor.

JESUS' KINGDOM AND THE POOR

Luke's gospel defines Jesus as such, a man of mission in the following:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD (Luke 4: 18 – 19).

It is no doubt that Luke import this reference from Isaiah 61 where theologians' attention have been on 'the Christology involved and to the nature of the program of liberation.'²⁵⁸ The reference gives an indication of Jesus' clear cut divine mandate: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon... He has anointed me... He has me.*" It is like Jesus saying "I have been prepared, empowered and cut out for this mission from of old" signaling the prophetic place of his earthly mission. 'A prophetic identity for Jesus is of importance to Luke in this periscope and elsewhere.'²⁵⁹

Thus, the reference defines the mission, content, and the target people of Jesus' Kingdom of God. The content involves the preaching of the gospel to the poor, healing, and the proclaiming of liberty and recovery. The content of Jesus' mission can be categorized under the words and the actions of Jesus. Jesus did not only speak forth the word, He also acted on the word.

Note that the centrality of Jesus' message or mission is the kingdom of God and the centrality of Jesus' kingdom of God is the poor. Most theologians concur that the poor are the target of Jesus earthly ministry. He came for the poor. The gospel refers to the proclamation of the good news, *eu-aggelion*, as in words and this good news has to do with the person of Jesus himself. Sobrina

²⁵⁸ See John Nolland, ed., *Word Biblical Commentary* Volume 35 Luke 1 – 9:20 (Dallas: Word Books, Publishers, 1989), p. 195.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* The term "elsewhere" refers to references which see Jesus as a prophet like Luke 4: 24: 'Then He said, "I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country".'

attests to the fact that ‘The conclusion has to be that in the Gospels, Jesus is the good news, but, with logical priority, the good news is what Jesus brings: the Kingdom of God.’²⁶⁰

The main people to whom Jesus was sent by God to bring the message of the kingdom of God are the poor. Who then are the poor? In the beatitudes, according to Luke’s gospel, Jesus said “Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God,”²⁶¹ but Mathew’s gospel makes an addition to this: “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*, For theirs is the kingdom of God.”²⁶² Whereas Luke gives an open definition of the poor, Mathew narrows it – the poor in spirit. According to Sobrino, the Synoptic gospels categorizes the poor into two, namely, the Economic Poor and the Sociological Poor; but he also made mention in passing the Spiritually Poor, which I intend to include to have three main classes of the poor in Jesus’ kingdom message. Now, note that the praxis of Jesus’ kingdom of God is much revealed in how he addressed the needs of the poor.

The Economic Poor

The Economic Poor are those in need or those who lack one way or the other some sort of basic necessities of life, and so they described as those who hunger and thirst, who are naked and needs clothing, who are sick and find it difficult to get healing due to lack of funds, strangers, prisoners, those who mourn, and those are heavy laden with load of care.²⁶³ These features, according, Sobrino, are also interpreted by Jesus as oppression, referring to people who struggle for survival in life and are usually denied basic needs in society.²⁶⁴ The poor, here, in today’s world, are those who lack shelter, food, cloths, and employment; they also those who may have a form of employment but are used and exploited by the rich. How did Jesus address this category of poor people?

Jesus’ good news and actions sought to reach out to these people. Jesus fed those who were hungry with food (Matthew 14: 13 – 21; Mark 6: 32 – 44; Luke 9: 10 – 17; and John 6: 1 – 13). In these feeding stories, Jesus saw the need to give the multitude food to eat: “*You give them something to eat*” (Luke 9:13). Though the number was too large for him to feed since they did

²⁶⁰ See Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 78.

²⁶¹ See Luke 6: 20 (NKJV).

²⁶² See Mathew 5: 3 (NKJV), *Emphasis are mine*.

²⁶³ See Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 80.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

not have that much food for them, as the disciples responded, Jesus was determined to that. It is deduced that such multitudes were the desperate poor majority in the then society who were somehow ready to receive the good news, the new kingdom. Mark's gospel reports that when Jesus saw the multitude he 'was move compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd' (6:34). The word "compassion" is also translated to mean "pity". Sobrino argues that 'pity is what at once explains and is expressed in Jesus' miracles, and what defines him in basic ways.'²⁶⁵ He further explains that:

Jesus appears as someone deeply moved by the suffering of others, reacting to this in a saying way and making this reaction something first and last for him, the criterion governing his whole practice. Jesus sees the suffering of others as something final that can only be reacted to adequately with finality... The reality of the suffering of others is what affected Jesus most deeply and made him react with finality from the inmost depths of his being.²⁶⁶

Jesus saw food as a basic necessity of life and was ever ready to provide whenever the need arose. Was the multitude he fed economically poor people? Probably yes because, at the time of the incidence, the rich could not have stooped so low to be fed by him and also to associate with the poor as in terms of table fellowship.

Furthermore, the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus, when asked by the audience as what they should do in response to his preaching, told them that those who had more cloths and food should share with those who did not have; and that the tax collectors should stop taking more than what was required for payment, and soldiers were admonished not to extort money from the people (Luke 3: 10 – 14). Furthermore, Jesus healed many sick people. Luke's gospel records that "When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid hands on everyone of them and healed them."²⁶⁷ Jesus is also said to have healed lepers and paralytic.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ See Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 90.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ See Luke 4: 40 (NKJV).

²⁶⁸ See Luke 5: 12 – 15, 17 – 26.

The Sociological Poor

The Sociological Poor are the class of people who were undermined and despised by the ruling class of society and branded as sinners, publicans, prostitutes, simple-minded, little ones, least, and as well as those who did menial work in the society.²⁶⁹ They are those the bourgeois in society look down upon and would not want to associate with. It was this kind of people that Jesus' kingdom message and practice were directed. Fuellenbach explains that: 'A large part of his ministry consists of such activities as his table fellowship with tax-collectors and sinners ... In his communion with the outcast Jesus lives out the kingdom, demonstrating in action God's unconditional love for undeserving sinners.'²⁷⁰ Most parables show how Jesus sought to bridge the partition between the upper class – both ruling and rich – and the lower class – majority and the marginalized. The story of Jesus with Mary Magdalene, the prostitute, in Luke (7: 36 – 50), demonstrates how Jesus' kingdom of God embraces the marginalized – those society has put a negative tag on as deviants and unfit. The story reveals that Jesus related closely with both those described by society as saints (the Pharisees) and profanes (the prostitutes).

Sobrino further describes the poor – both economic and sociological – in the following words:

The poor are those who are at the bottom of the heap in history and those who are oppressed by society and cast out from it; they are not, therefore, all human beings, but those at the bottom, and being in the bottom in this sense means being oppressed by those on top... The poor are those close to the slow death poverty brings, those for whom surviving is a heavy burden ... those who are also deprived of social dignity and sometimes also of religious dignity for not complying with church legislations. The poor are ... the "popular majorities."²⁷¹

Undoubtedly, Sobrino argues, Jesus showed partiality to the poor. That, Jesus showed 'partiality toward the economic poor, as shown in the beatitudes in Luke, and partiality toward the sociological poor, as shown in his standing up for publicans and sinners expressed with even more force, perhaps, than the former, precisely' due to the fact that their rejection on the grounds

²⁶⁹ See Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 80.

²⁷⁰ See Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, p. 4. Even though tax collectors, in those days, were not economically poor, they were shunned by society as corrupted people and therefore socially unacceptable. The story of Zacchaeus gives insight into this (Luke 19: 1 – 10). Jesus' readiness to fellowship with Zacchaeus resulted in his moral repentance and restitution – "Look, Lord I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

²⁷¹ See Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, pp. 80 – 81.

of religion was more vexatious to him.²⁷² Much as, both the economic and the sociological poor are seen as Jesus' addressees, Sobrino also notes the existence of a group known as the *dialectically poor*, which has to do with the relationship and the tension between the poor and the rich in Jesus' encounters.²⁷³

The Dialectically Poor: Sharing / Giving Among the Rich and the Poor in the Kingdom

Philip Francis Esler has argued that, in Luke's gospel, there exist wealthy people in the Christian community of which Jesus warns to change their ways.²⁷⁴ Passages like 'the Parable of the Rich Fool (12: 13 – 21), the command to sell one's possessions and give alms (13: 33), the instruction to invite beggars, etc., to banquets (14: 12 – 14), the saying about making friends out of unrighteous Mammon (16:9) and the story of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19 – 31)... and, lastly, the incident of the rich ruler (18: 18 – 30)'²⁷⁵ all point to the strong presence of either the rich who were already part of the kingdom or those who expressed the desire to be part of it.

The notion of the dialectically poor, therefore, has to do Jesus' call for reflection or praxis of the kingdom through sharing or giving of material possession of the rich for the benefit of the poor. Here, Jesus' kingdom of God is considered as that which creates a community that enhances harmonious interaction between the rich and the poor, the upper class of minority and the lower class of majority in society. In Luke 14: 1 – 14, Jesus insists on the rich's readiness to share selflessly with the poor, and the elite's readiness to sit at lower of place of the table together with the social outcasts for a meal. Jesus did not condemn the rich, he called on them to share and socialize with the poor, the marginalized. This point is made by Halvor Moxnes²⁷⁶ in his discussion of Luke 4: 16 - 19 as follows:

A return to a situation of equality and justice for all, however, required a reversal of the present situation.

Luke describes this reversal primarily in terms of socioeconomic relations within Jewish society, the

²⁷² *Ibid*, p. 81.

²⁷³ *Ibid*.

²⁷⁴ See Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke – Acts: The social and political motivations of Lucan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 184.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 184 – 5.

²⁷⁶ Halvor Moxnes is a scholar and professor of New Testament Studies at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Oslo – Norway.

relations between the rich and the needy, the powerful and the weak. Thus, Luke envisages a reversal that implied a central, forced *redistribution* of goods and possessions... This reversal was an act of God, and the divine redistribution was manifested through the acts and speeches of Jesus, the benefactor of humanity.²⁷⁷

So, Jesus never hated the poor, never excluded them but sought to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak through redistribution which appears to favor the poor. Moxnes sees this as the divine act which ‘served as the foundation for a new interaction among individuals and groups, likewise based on generalized reciprocity and redistribution.’²⁷⁸ Thus, the feeling of spiritual poverty – the lack of God – becomes a meeting point for both the rich and the poor for a communal life. I believe this was the objective of Jesus’ kingdom of God, that all – the ruling class and the ruled, the rich and the poor, the upper minority and the lower majority, shall live together in harmony with no needy person or group among; to promote communalism instead of individualism in society. Luke’s Acts of the Apostles give vivid description of early church reflecting the Jesus’ kingdom of God characterized by community of sharing or community of goods:

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common... Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.²⁷⁹

In Luke 14: 7 – 14, Jesus admonishes the proud who always look for recognition in gatherings to learn to humble themselves until due honor is bestowed on them; He also teaches the same proud – rich people – to include the poor in their list of guests whenever they organize parties, the reason being friends, colleagues do usually repay but the poor cannot repay, the repayment of the poor is always taken care of by God. Here, Jesus wants to change the system of exchange at the time, and so he sees parties as point of meeting and interaction between people and in this case, for Jesus, it should be between both the rich and the poor with the rich not expecting reciprocity from the poor; the rich who able to create such a common ground for the poor as well shall receive their reward in heaven, which means she/he shall also gain entrance into the future kingdom of God through such good acts. In effect, as Moxnes expresses, ‘People with resources

²⁷⁷ See Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke’s Gospel* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1988), pp. 154 – 155.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 155.

²⁷⁹ See Acts 4: 32 – 35 (NKJV).

are urged to be generous without limits. They are involved in a situation with great difference in power and resources, and they are asked to perform *redistribution*.²⁸⁰

Jesus considers this act giving or sharing as a pure gesture, an action that proceeds from one's heart: 'Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your part inward is full of greed and wickedness... But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you."²⁸¹ Despite the several criticisms regarding Luke's equation of cup and dish to man's heart²⁸², the fact remains that, in Luke, Jesus lays emphasis on giving by the rich as virtue which results in purity in the kingdom of God. In this regard, Moxnes referring to Luke's accusation of the Pharisees explains that:

Purity was not guaranteed by observance of ritual purity; it was a matter of social relations and behavior toward others. Here, Luke stands within a long tradition of opposition to the official cult within Israel, a tradition which emphasized the necessity of solidarity within the people and criticized the ruling class for cultic purity alone.²⁸³

According to Jesus, indicated in Luke, failure on the side of the rich to give to or share with the needy shall eventually result in negative social relations in the society. *Sharing* here is what Marshall Sahlins²⁸⁴ refer to as *generalized reciprocity*.²⁸⁵ The latter has to do with 'transactions that are putatively altruistic, transactions on the line of assistance given and, if possible and necessary, assistance returned.'²⁸⁶ In simple terms, generalized reciprocity is a form of giving that does not look forward to a reimbursement or favor from the beneficiary; it is purely, a gift resulting in positive social relations. The opposite, *negative reciprocity*, is what Jesus criticized. It is 'the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity, the reversal forms of appropriation, transactions opened and conducted toward net utilitarian advantage.'²⁸⁷ Here, goods are kept for the benefit of few relations and exploitation is at its peak, and giving is carried strictly for a return of favor or with interest charged. Moxnes adds that 'Acts of negative reciprocity in

²⁸⁰ See Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, p.155.

²⁸¹ See Luke 11: 39 – 41 (NKJV)

²⁸² See Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, pp. 110 – 111.

²⁸³ See Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, p. 112.

²⁸⁴ Marshall Sahlins is a Professor of Anthropology and Emeritus at the University of Chicago.

²⁸⁵ See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London: Routledge , 2004), p. 193. Also see Halvor, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, p. 115 – 117.

²⁸⁶ See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 193 – 194.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 195.

relations between leaders and lesser leaders or between leaders and people are, for instance, killings with robbery and confiscation of goods.’²⁸⁸

Another kind of reciprocity which Jesus sought to repudiate is balanced reciprocity. According to Sahlins, balance reciprocity refers to ‘direct exchange.’²⁸⁹ ‘In precise balance, the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received and is without delay.’²⁹⁰ This has to do with exchange and giving of gifts among friends, colleagues, couples, and people of almost the same rank in society²⁹¹, call them *birds of the same feather*. In Luke 14: 12, Jesus admonished: “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid.”

The Spiritually Poor

Sobrino’s argument of Jesus appearing to have had little emphasis on the spiritually poor is probably misleading.²⁹² On the contrary, the definition of the spiritually poor gives us clue to the impartial nature of Jesus’ kingdom of God. This approach to the discussion of the kingdom of God makes Jesus’ message receptive in most African contexts, for example, Ghana. Spirituality of Jesus’ Kingdom of God easily fits the situation of Africans due to the nature of the African traditional religions – the reality of spirits who dwell together with humans and who have great influence (both negative and positive) on the daily lives of the people. Here, the wellbeing of the people (socio-economic and political) is highly dependent on their contact with the spirit world for life and security. It is against this background that theology in Africa is tenable and complete without emphasis on the spiritual life of the people. The African’s religious life commences with an experience of the spirit world or the object of worship. Who then are the spiritually poor?

²⁸⁸ See Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, p. 116.

²⁸⁹ See Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, p. 194.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ Moxnes relates that ‘Hospitality and gift-giving to strangers are included here; on an intertribal level, this is the alternative to fighting. The goal of hospitality and gift-giving on an intertribal level is to prevent strife and to preserve the social order.’ *The Economy of the Kingdom*, p. 116. Thus, giving here can be a form of bribe to silence the majority from revolting or causing chaos in the society.

²⁹² Sobrino argues that the New Testament Greek word most frequently used to describe the poor is ‘*ptochos* (from the verb *ptosso*, to crouch or bend down).’ That the term appears twenty-five times out of which twenty-two cases refer to “the economically afflicted and dispossessed.” That the three remaining cases refer to the spiritually poor.

They are simply those who hunger and thirst for God and righteousness; those who are unsatisfied with their moral decadence state and yearns for divine or spiritual transformative power to breakthrough in their lives.

The prior entry requirement for Jesus' kingdom of God is for one to hear and believe in the good news and respond to it in faith; John's gospel places emphasis on spiritual thirst signaled by Jesus – 'On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."' This is not referring to economic and sociological thirsts, even though some may argue as such, but Jesus is calling on His audience to leap in faith to be partakers of the spiritual kingdom, first, which ministers outward grace (that is, healing the physically sick and feeding them that lack food). For the kingdom of God is not just eating and drinking, as the Epistle of Romans puts it, but in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.²⁹³ Similarly, see Jesus' reaction towards the multitudes whom he fed the previous day according to John 6. He told them they were not seeking Him because of the signs they saw but because of the food they had to their fill. He said to them: "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life".²⁹⁴

The spiritual hunger and thirst for God serves as the entry points into the kingdom of God in the terms of the present and also the determining factor for being part of the future kingdom. As far as the definition of the spiritually poor is concerned everyone outside the Jesus' kingdom of God – whether economically and sociologically rich or poor – is inclusive: "All have sinned and fallen short of the grace of God". The definition of the spiritually poor also opens up God's invitation to everyone (the rich and the poor, the sick and healthy) making Jesus' partiality towards only the poor, as claimed by Sobrino, a bit hasty.²⁹⁵ It is true that Jesus' message of the kingdom rather appealed more to the poor but it also called on the rich to share so can be part of.

It is obvious that the main focal group of Jesus' kingdom is the poor, and the poor includes those who hunger and thirst for God (spiritually) as well as those who are in need economically and sociologically. The spiritual poverty is an integrating factor for qualification into the kingdom of God.

²⁹³ See Romans 14: 17.

²⁹⁴ See John 6: 22 – 27.

²⁹⁵ See Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, p. 81.

In summary, I concur with Esler that ‘it appears likely that Luke’s community encompassed individuals from the top and bottom strata of Hellenistic society, but that his presentation of the gospel radically elevates the destitute to a position of prominence.’²⁹⁶ And also that, in Luke, ‘Jesus promises to alleviate the extreme physical deprivation suffered by the beggars, the blind, the lame, the imprisoned and so forth, without, however, ignoring the spiritual aspects of salvation.’²⁹⁷

The primary objective of Jesus’ gospel of the kingdom of God is to provide for the poor, liberate the oppressed from the oppressors and to bridge the relational gap between the rich and the poor in society. Through the message of the kingdom, Jesus seeks to establish a new community of sharing or giving for the common good of all. In this kingdom, the basic responsibility of leadership role is to ensure redistribution of the resources of the community, especially, the rich easily let go of their wealth for the good of all. Jesus, also, seeks to establish a new system of exchange, that is, generalized reciprocity as well as a cordial social interaction between the rich and the poor.

²⁹⁶ See Esler, *Community and gospel in Luke – Acts*, p. 183.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter 7:

CONCLUDING REMARKS: RELATING JESUS' KINGDOM OF GOD TO GHANA'S NEW CHRISTIANITY

I have pointed out in the chapter two of this study that, statistically, Christianity is the leading religious tradition in Ghana with 70% adherents, and that the Pentecostal Christianity (that is, both the classical and the new) is the fastest denomination. One compelling feature of the latter is the zeal for evangelicalism – the propagation of the gospel Jesus Christ. The propagation is usually done by the electronic media (both radio and television), open crusades on stadia, parks and market places, house-to-house evangelism, bus evangelism and the like. The popular theme that runs through most of these gospel campaigns has to with *Jesus and the Kingdom of God – salvation, deliverance or exorcism, promised wealth or prosperity, etc.*

Indeed, Ghana's new Christianity is saddled with theological challenges, one of which is the understanding of Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God. Notwithstanding these challenges, the new churches seem to have succeeded quantitatively and economically. The quantitative growth can be attributed to the appealing on Jesus' kingdom emphasis on the Spirit, exorcisms, and healings. Stress on the Spirit resonates with the nature of the African religions and cultures; it is well known fact that African traditional religion is animistic and John Mbiti, African philosopher, is a known for saying that African are notoriously religious. The religiosity of Africans is fused with spiritual realities and entities – belief in the Supreme Being, lesser deities or gods, ancestors, charms and amulets, and evil spirits.

The aspect of Jesus' kingdom that seeks to exorcise demon possessed people is a common feature in most African religious traditions. Akans of Ghana, for instance, hold the belief that when some comes under demonic influence resulting in bad omen such as incurable illness or chronic socio-economic failures, the only way of freedom to consult the spiritualist or the traditional priest or priestess *ward off* such evil, called, *mmusuyi*. It is, therefore, good news to hear Jesus saying "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has

come upon you.”²⁹⁸ This practice, as indicated in Jesus’ kingdom acts, is characteristic in the new churches in Ghana and in Africa. As such ‘Ghanaian proponents of the healing and deliverance phenomenon generally believe firmly in a causal relationship between sin, the work of demons and sickness.’²⁹⁹ Asamoah-Gyadu’s further explanation is worth noting:

Deliverance means more of than exorcism, the expulsion of evil spirits. It has to do with freeing people from ‘bondage’ to sin and Satan... In the healing and deliverance hermeneutic, *possession* refers to altered states of consciousness, conditions in which suffering or ‘unnatural behaviour’ is deemed to be the result of an invasion of the human body by an alien spirit... Oppression on the other hand refers to suffering or frustrations in life, including insomnia, poor financial management, frequent illness, failure to receive contracts or lack of academic progress, all of which may be interpreted as resulting from satanic or demonic activity.³⁰⁰

The point here is that the new churches’ worldview is spiritually condensed and defined with spiritual lenses – everything is connected to the spirit world. So the spiritual aspect of Jesus’ kingdom of God is factor to the prolific spread of Christianity in Ghana and in Africa as whole. However, this emphasis has led to the neo-Pentecostal churches’ blindness to the centrality of Jesus’ kingdom of God – preaching the good news to the poor.

The economic growth refers to the way and manner the new churches are amassing wealth through the emphasis on material prosperity as presented in chapter five of the study. This is where the challenge is. I have argued that the leadership of Ghana’s new churches gathers so much money, a kind of pool, but fails redistribute to the poor within and without. At best, what prevails is close to the definition of negative reciprocity; the poor keep giving to the church but the leaders (pastors, prophets, bishops, etc) do not give back to the poor and the needy. There is a vast difference between the economic and sociological rich and poor. This calls for re-look at the theological educational emphasis of these new churches as well as that of the theological institutions. What I set to do in this study was to find out the various perceptions about the Jesus’ kingdom of God and its praxis in Ghana’s new Christianity. The findings are revealing:

²⁹⁸ See Matthew 12: 28 (NKJV)

²⁹⁹ See Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, p. 167.

³⁰⁰ See Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, p. 167.

The Gospel of the Kingdom Understood as another Colonial Imperialistic Rule

I have pointed out that the gospel did not gain popularity during the era of colonialism because of the latter's inhuman practices like slave trade and exploitation of Africans. The gospel was perceived as another imperial rule especial when it was spoken in terms of kingdom. As a result, Ghana's first president, Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, rather preferred the people, in the quest for freedom from colonialism, to seek first the political kingdom or freedom of the nation. He stood against the churches because he saw them as bedmates of the imperial power which sat on the liberty of Ghanaians. The only way to accept Christianity was to look at it contextually. After the independence from the colonial rule, Christianity went through various phases of renewal – mainline churches, spiritual churches, classical Pentecostal churches, and neo-Pentecostal churches. The neo-Pentecostal Christianity is now an influential and a challenge to African Christianity.

Ghana's New Christianity puts stress on the Kingdom of God as a Spiritual Phenomenon

The perception of the Jesus' kingdom of God as pre-dominantly spiritual has overshadowed the socio-economic significance of it in the life of the church and the society. The poor are defined in spiritual terms and as result they are perceived as people who need *spiritual* healing and exorcisms. This definitely has resulted in less praxis of Jesus' kingdom of God which seeks to liberate the economic and sociological poor and offer them life of freedom and wellbeing. Also, such perception has impacted negatively on the social relations in the church and her environment – there is an attitude of less concern for the need to respond practically and materially to the poor. The poor are, thus, marginalized and discriminated against by the economic rich. I discovered, from my fieldwork, that some leaders would not mix socially with the poor rather they would do it with the rich because of the economic gain. Such leaders would claim that the poor need prayer and deliverance rather social interaction. Spiritualizing Jesus' kingdom message makes us lose its earthly significance.

Preachers' stress on Giving for the Expansion of the Church and the Wellbeing of themselves

One of the clear features of the new churches is the stress on giving for the expansion of the church and to support the leaders (mostly pastors). Giving in the form tithing and free will offering is a major theme of the prosperity gospel or wealth preachers.³⁰¹ This has resulted, in most case, extreme riches of church leaders (particularly, the leading pastors, bishops, apostles or prophets as they are popularly called). So, we have a situation where much giving is going on in the church by both the rich and the poor but there is no redistribution by the leadership as Jesus' kingdom praxis would require them to do. It is like saying that material possessions are placed under the apostles feet but the apostles do not distribute it to the needy ones, they spend it on themselves and their families and friends. There is therefore a breach in Jesus' kingdom praxis by the leaders of the church today. The riches of the leaders have caused a gap between themselves and their adherents as well as the public. This is contrary to what Jesus' kingdom calls for; his kingdom calls for sharing not just within the believing community but in the society at large. Jesus admonishes that the crippled, the dumb, the blind, the leper and economic poor shall dwell together with the rich in generalized reciprocity. The church in Ghana today falls short of this principle of the kingdom.

The neo-Pentecostals' gospel of prosperity has taken the central place in Ghanaian Christianity instead the gospel of the kingdom of God

It clear from the study that the quest for material prosperity or wealth acquisition has overshadowed the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to the poor. Poverty is seen as a curse and enemy of the Christian's progress, and so the attention of the preacher is focused on freeing themselves from the grip of poverty. Preachers who have succeeded in breaking loose from poverty consider themselves capable of setting others free from poverty. This mission has resulted in controversial practices such as discussed in this study.

³⁰¹ See chapter 3 and 5.

CONCLUSION

The nation of Ghana, as well as Africa as a whole, has come far with Christianity representing the fastest growing religious tradition. Amidst this *success* story, the nation is also plagued with poverty coupled with diseases and sicknesses. The question that arises from this is: *If Jesus kingdom message focused on liberating the oppressed from the oppressor and providing food for the hungry or the poor, and the same gospel is being preached in Ghana and Africa, then why is poverty still a challenge and the rich getting rich everyday within the same community? Is the gospel of the kingdom preached by Jesus the same gospel being preached today? Or do we have another gospel?* Well these questions seem to suggest further investigation into the kind of gospel messages we hear today in Ghana or in Africa as a continent.

Furthermore, the findings of my studies also suggest that a different gospel other than the gospel of the kingdom of God is being propagated. I have argued that the gospel which is preached in Ghana today, popularly known as the prosperity gospel or (wealth), results in making the rich richer and the poor poorer. That is to say, the individual leaders of the neo-Pentecostal churches, (called pastors, prophets, apostles and bishops), do spend the churches' money on themselves and fail to redistribute to the poor and the needy. In contrast, Jesus' kingdom of God seeks the practice of sharing or redistribution of the wealth of the rich and vice versa. Jesus' kingdom ensures harmonious interaction between the rich and the poor, particularly, through table fellowship – sharing of meal together.

The social differences within most churches in Ghana are glaring. The rich associate with the rich and they also easily exchange gifts. Giving to the poor is best described as a patron-client relation in which the receiver is always dependent and indebted to the giver; giving to the poor is a favor from the rich. Distribution of leadership roles in the church also revolves around the pastor and the rich. The church, thus, need to revisit the prayer of Jesus: *Our Father in heaven, Your kingdom come. Your will be done earth as it is in heaven.* The church needs theological orientation in Jesus' kingdom of God.

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